







A MANUAL OF INSTRUCTION AND ADVICE  
FOR CLASS LEADERS



A Manual  
OF  
INSTRUCTION AND ADVICE  
FOR  
CLASS LEADERS.

BY THE  
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*Prepared by order of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference.*

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## PREFACE.

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THIS Manual has been prepared by order of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. When the Report of the Committee on Church Membership was presented to the Conference of 1889, it was felt that some instruction in the nature and duties of their office would be serviceable to the Class Leaders of Methodism. A large and representative Committee was appointed to arrange for the preparation of a book that would assist the Leaders in their work. At the Conference of 1890, the Committee was re-appointed. When it met, the responsible task of writing this Manual was placed in the hands of the Convener.

The work must speak for itself. The writer would, however, acknowledge the great assistance that he has received from the members of the Committee, who have made most valuable suggestions. His special thanks are due to the Rev. Joseph Bush, who pre-



pared the manuscript of the first part of the Manual for the press.

The Compendium of Later Regulations has been compiled with the assistance of the Rev. Charles E. Wansbrough, whose knowledge of the Laws of Methodism is conclusively shown, not only in the Appendix to this volume, but also in his invaluable Handbook to the Minutes of the Conference.

J. S. S.

BROMLEY, KENT,  
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# MANUAL FOR CLASS LEADERS.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE FIRST CLASS MEETINGS.

ON February 15th, 1742, a remarkable meeting was held in Bristol. It had been called by John Wesley, and its business was to consider the question of the debt which pressed upon the Methodist Society in that city. The debt had been incurred by the erection of the "Room" in the Horsefair. The attendance at the meeting was large, and the conversation was earnest. Suddenly, light broke in upon the perplexed counsellors. Captain Foy, a member of the Society, who evidently possessed a genius for organisation, propounded a scheme whereby the burdensome debt might be gradually abolished. He suggested that the members of the Society should be grouped in sections of twelve persons, and that one of their number should be responsible for collecting weekly from each of the others, a contribution of one penny towards the debt upon the Building Fund. The suggestion commended itself to those who were present; it was adopted; and, as soon as it was brought into operation, its practical efficiency was demonstrated.

The Bristol "plan" was soon found to be a solvent



of other difficulties besides those caused by the erection of Preaching-Houses. In 1742, the success of Methodism as an evangelising force among the English people was proved. A very large number of persons in London, Bristol, and elsewhere, had been profoundly moved by the preaching of the evangelists of the new era, and had crowded into the Methodist Societies, eager to "flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." Wesley gives the following description of the "rise of the United Society":—"In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together; which, from thenceforward, they did every week, viz. on Thursday, in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), I gave those advices, from time to time, which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meetings with prayer suitable to their several necessities. This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places."

John Wesley, whose clear eyes were never dazzled by mere numerical success, watched the swift increase of his Societies with a joy that was tempered by caution. He saw that he was becoming embarrassed by the rapid multiplication of new centres, and by the

ingathering of multitudes of comparatively unknown converts. It was borne in upon him that an exact and individual supervision of such persons was essential. It was impossible to give such supervision himself, and it was equally impossible for his little band of itinerating Preachers to supply his lack of service. He waited patiently for a solution of the problem which, in its moral aspect, was exceedingly serious. In due time, he found that the ray of light which had relieved the darkness of the financial embarrassment in Bristol had also struck upon and revealed a pathway which would lead him out of his pastoral difficulty. The pence-collectors in Bristol, in their house-to-house visitation, discovered occasionally that some of their contributors did not live "as they ought." They reported their discovery to Wesley, who "in a moment" detected the unsuspected and permanent value of the plan which had been temporarily adopted. He said to himself, "This is the thing, the very thing we have wanted so long." He called together the Collectors, who were known as "Leaders," and desired that each would make particular inquiry into the behaviour of those whom he saw weekly. This was done. He sums up the result thus: "Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some turned from the evil of their ways. Some were put away from us. Many saw it with fear, and rejoiced unto God with reverence."

As soon as the new instrument was put into his hands, Wesley used it with precision and success. He introduced this method of inspecting his Societies wherever they had been formed. In his Journal, on Thursday, March 25th, 1742, he says: "I appointed

several earnest and sensible men to meet me, to whom I showed the great difficulty I had long found of knowing the people who desired to be under my care. After much discourse, they all agreed there could be no better way to come to a sure, thorough knowledge of each person, than to divide them into classes, like those at Bristol, under the inspection of those in whom I could most confide. This was the origin of our classes at London, for which I can never sufficiently praise God; the unspeakable usefulness of the institution having ever since been more and more manifest." Throughout the country the new system was inaugurated. The Societies were divided into small sections, and the "Leaders" of these sections were initiated into their important duties. The work of a Leader was to see the Members of his Class once a week, for the following purposes:—First, to inquire how their souls prospered; secondly, to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion might require; and, thirdly, to receive what the Members were willing to give towards the relief of the poor. For a time the Leaders carried on this self-denying work. They called on each Member at his or her own house, or place of residence. But it was soon found that this plan of house-to-house visitation would cause the new arrangement to break down by its own weight. It was seen that it not only took up more time than the Leaders had to spare, but that there were other serious objections against it. It was, therefore, agreed that the Members of each Class should meet all together in one place. In these little assemblies, full inquiry was made into the behaviour of each person, "advice or reproof was given as need required, quarrels were made up, and

misunderstandings were removed. After an hour or two spent in this labour of love, they concluded with praise and thanksgiving."

We have given this sketch of the origin of the Class Meeting in order that we may discern its real character and purpose. The Class Meeting was, in many respects, the Society in miniature. All who read Wesley's description of the origin of the "United Society" must detect the resemblance between the two institutions. The Members of the Classes were persons who had been awakened to an acute consciousness of God and Eternity. They began to meet in Class, because "they desired to flee from the wrath to come." The sermons of the early Methodist preachers "illuminated" the creeds which had become dull by reason of unbelieving use. They taught that Christ would come to judge the quick and the dead, and they did not hesitate to depict the terror of His final advent. They appealed to the imagination, they roused the conscience. Under their exhortations the "desire" to flee from the wrath to come grew into a passion. Its voice silenced the pleadings of self, of the world, and of friends. Awakened men pressed into the Societies, consumed with an anxiety to know how they might "abide the day of His coming."

But "a desire to flee from the wrath to come" was not the only condition of membership in the early Methodist Societies. We do well to emphasise this fact, as it is sometimes overlooked. Such a "desire," if existing alone, might have been serviceable as a force administering a first impetus in the right direction; but noble souls are not sustained and trained by this "desire" exclusively. The early

Methodist met in Class, because he also desired "to be saved from his sins." The terror of the Judgment Day never lost its vividness; but gradually the meaning of sin was more and more fully felt and understood, and then its intolerable burden crushed the heart. To obtain pardon for the past, to experience the "new birth," to feel that the power of "cancelled sin" was broken, to move upwards towards a life absolutely delivered from evil and completely filled with good, to love God with all the heart and soul and mind and strength, and his neighbour as himself, these were the ruling desires of the early Methodist. Without them a man lacked fitness for permanent membership in the Society.

Some persons, who are unskilful in accurate quotation and exposition, have criticised the "condition of membership" with considerable severity. Stress has been laid upon the former part, which concerns "the wrath to come;" and the latter part, which insists on salvation from sin, has been ignored. The combination is essential. And we may well ask if any person is fit for membership in any section of the Christian Church in whom such desires are absent? Such a "condition" might well form a test of fitness for membership in the Church Universal. The Catholic Church throughout the centuries has lifted up its voice daily in the creed and prayer: "We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge. We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood. Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting. O Lord, save Thy people, and bless Thy heritage. Govern them, and lift them up for ever." The

Methodist condition of membership is in perfect harmony with these sublime petitions.

The character of the early Methodist Class Meeting was determined by the circumstances and purpose of its creation. On all hands it is now sorrowfully confessed that the doctrines relating to personal pardon, individual reconciliation to God, and the abiding consciousness of the Divine favour, had, with lamentably few exceptions, ceased to be preached from Episcopalian and Dissenting pulpits. If a man was convinced of sin, he had to seek relief from his burden by consulting the Methodists. Anxiety for forgiveness often led very many persons, who were members of other Churches, to join the Methodist Societies; such association at that time not interfering with their membership elsewhere. They came in order that they might find out the secret of pardon; having found pardon, they stayed because they desired holiness. The Classroom from the beginning has been an Inquiry Room. Men and women in distress asked, "What must I do to be saved?" That question was answered by the counsels of the Leader, and by the recital of the experience of the Members. Having been led to the Cross of Christ themselves, their willing hands were eagerly stretched out to guide others thither also. But the first step in the way of salvation having been taken, the long journey that had to be accomplished before "perfection's height" could be reached came into view. It must be remembered that "Christian Perfection" was one of the most conspicuous doctrines of early Methodism. It was constantly preached, incessantly taught in the Class Meeting, and its truth was very frequently realised. Without holiness in

heart and life, the revival of the doctrine of Justification by Faith would not have been an unmixed good. John Wesley dreaded Antinomianism. He found that to insist upon the necessity for Christian Perfection was its best corrective. And so "Full Redemption" became the burden of hymn, and experience, and prayer, and it exercised a determining influence upon the tone and character of the Methodist people.

Wesley describes the "United Society" as "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness; united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation." The description accurately depicts the character of the Class Meeting. "Salvation" was the dominant idea in the little assemblies. The Class Meeting existed in order that its Members might enjoy salvation in its fullest sense. The Members were united together to help each other to gain complete deliverance from sin. They pleaded for one another in prayer. By the recital of their experience they encouraged the timid, counselled the perplexed, rebuked the lukewarm, instructed the ignorant, and guided the anxious inquirer "into the way of peace." Nor was the bond of mutual sympathy and help broken when the Class Meeting closed. They watched over each other during the week; ready to help in the moment of temptation, quick to place a hand under a brother's cross, courageous to point out a fault in spirit or conduct, inflexible in their protest against wrong-doing, eager to rejoice with them that did rejoice, ready to weep with them that wept. When we look upon these little groups of men and women

associated together to "help each other to work out their salvation," we are reminded of the experience of the Church in the purest age of Christianity. We think of those Pentecost converts who "continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." We are not alone in detecting this resemblance. Paley, in his *Evidences of Christianity*, explains the character of the Christian Church during the first century by pointing to its modern representative, the Methodist Society. Dr. Rigg, in his *Comparative View of Church Organisations*, has established the parallel. If any doubt remains, let the hymns "For the Society," which form Part V. in the Wesleyan Methodist Hymn Book, be carefully read. They enshrine the loftiest spirit of Christianity. In their vivid perception of the "real presence" of Christ with His people, their yearning after the mind that was in Him, their passionate pleading to be delivered from sin, their generous outlook towards the "things of others," their desire for "peace and unity," their recognition of the nearness of God in everyday life, their "sweet reasonableness" and bright hopefulness, their serene anticipation of the glory of the future world, they teach the only perfection which, at present, is possible to man. The character of the early Class Meeting may be judged by these hymns. Its purpose was fulfilled when the counsel was obeyed,—

"Then let us wait the sound  
That shall our souls release;  
And labour to be found  
Of Him in spotless peace,  
In perfect holiness renewed,  
Adorned with Christ, and meet for God."



## CHAPTER II.

### THE FIRST CLASS LEADERS.

WE have seen that Class Meetings were established in order that Wesley might "come to a sure, thorough knowledge of each person" who was a Member of his Societies. In his journeys through the country, it was impossible that he could see the daily life of individual Methodists, and so the Leaders had to use their eyes for him. He committed the work of supervision to the men in whom he could "most confide." When he was absent, he knew that they were doing their work; and when he visited a town, he received from the Leaders their reports, supplementing their work by examining the Members "one by one." The fugitive ministry of Wesley threw a heavy load of responsibility upon his Leaders, but that load was borne with admirable faithfulness.

When the number of the Societies increased throughout the country, Circuits were formed, and itinerant Preachers were stationed in them. The Preachers usually stayed in the Circuit for a year, and much of their time was absorbed in pioneer preaching, and in visiting the towns and villages in their far-extended "rounds." It was impossible that they could obtain by personal inspection a sure and thorough knowledge of each Member of the numerous

Societies under their care. And so the Leaders were "eyes for them" also, and kept them acquainted with the spiritual condition of those over whom they watched with ceaseless vigilance. When the "Assistant" or the "Helper," as the Ministers were then called, had preached in the appointed place, the general congregation was dismissed, and a meeting of the Society—that is, of all the Classes—was held. Once a quarter the meeting was special. The work of Wesley was repeated. The Members were individually questioned as to their spiritual condition; reports upon absent Members were given by the Leaders; and Tickets of Membership in the Society were written out by the Preacher, and delivered to those whom he deemed worthy to receive them.

When the work of the Preachers, instead of being spread over several counties, was concentrated on a smaller area, their opportunities of communication with the Leaders of a Society were multiplied. They met them once a week. At these meetings they received reports upon the spiritual condition of the Members. They examined the Class-papers, noting the number of times that each Member had attended, and the amount that he had contributed "to the support of the Gospel;" each Leader informed the Preacher of any in his class that were sick, and also "of any that walked disorderly, and would not be reproved." In these meetings, the Preachers, as Wesley's representatives, acted in his behalf, and when he came to the Circuit town they reported to him all that they had done. Thus, through his Preachers and his Leaders, Wesley established a mode by which he could closely watch his Societies; and

a danger which at one time threatened Methodism with incalculable damage was averted.

We wish now to catch a glimpse of the men who, in the earliest days of Methodism, sustained the position and did the work of the Class Leader. The materials for our sketch must be gathered from Wesley's description of the duties of the office, and, especially, from the "Rules of the Society." The statement that the Leaders were men in whom Wesley could "most confide" is very suggestive. He had the clearest conception of the reason of the creation of the Methodist Societies. That reason was pre-eminently spiritual. He did not preach in order that he might boast of numerical success; he preached that he might "spread scriptural holiness throughout the land." If a Society did not answer its purpose, he cut down its numbers with an almost ruthless severity. He had no objection to begin again if, by a new beginning, he could secure better building. At all hazards, he determined that, as far as human power can contribute to such a result, "the people called Methodists" should be distinguished by supreme love for God and universal love for men. A Methodist with a lower aim was not likely to win his confidence. We confide most in those who share our convictions, who sympathise with us in our highest ambitions, and who work by our side to realise them. Wesley's "confidence" in his Leaders was "a touch" that made them "kin." They were of one heart and mind; they stood fast "in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the Gospel."

The early Methodist Leader was characterised by superior spiritual life and force. It is superfluous to

say that he was a converted man. He had, probably in a very striking manner, experienced the wonders of the new birth. He could vividly depict the condition of the penitent, the joy of the pardoned, the peace of the renewed. The doctrine of the new birth had been rescued by Wesley from its neglectful custodians. It was no longer looked upon as a mysterious doctrine which could only be understood by theological experts; it became the possession of every man who sighed for pardon, and who pleaded that the love of God might be shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit given unto him. Before a Leader was appointed, he had to give satisfactory evidence that the great change had taken place in him. How could he who was blind, or purblind, lead men out of darkness into marvellous light?

But more than an experience of Regeneration was required. Wesley, as we have previously shown, insisted upon the constant teaching of the doctrine of Christian Perfection. The men chosen as Leaders had something more than an intellectual sympathy with him in his views. They had not only to understand and teach the doctrine, they had to ceaselessly seek to experience its truth. No man with a low estimate of the possibilities of the Christian life could be fitted to counsel those who were restlessly anxious to be "saved from their sins." And such persons abounded in the Methodist Societies. The Holy Spirit of God had not only convinced them of sin, but of Righteousness. The awful standard of the Divine Purity rose before them; as they saw it, they discerned a new and urgent meaning in the command, "Be ye holy, for I am holy!" Only men who submitted

every feeling, thought, and action of their life to that standard were fit to be entrusted with the charge of those who longed to "walk in the light, as God is in the light," and to prove that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin."

In addition to spiritual fitness, the position of a Leader demanded special qualities. A Leader should be able to lead. That is a truism. But as truths which are universally acknowledged are often generally neglected, it will be well to emphasise this truth. The power to lead is, to a great extent, a natural gift. Some men naturally see farther and more clearly than others, and by a wonderful witchery of word and look they can induce others to believe in "things not seen," and to pursue them with enthusiasm. A religious Leader must possess much of this subtle natural influence. But he must arm himself with something more compelling. The basis of leadership is faith. In the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are permitted to read the secret of the influence which allures men. The "witnesses," who are grouped into a glorious cloud, were men who led, because they gave substance to those things which seemed to others only "the baseless fabric of a vision." They realised the future; they treated it as if it were present; and as they stood radiant with the light of faith, men gathered around them, and followed them in their celestial march. Faith not only "turns to flight armies of aliens," it assembles and conducts the hosts of God. The men who were selected by Wesley for the work of Leaders possessed varying but sufficient degrees of this winning and guiding force.

Trustworthiness was one of the conspicuous qualities of the first Class Leaders. Their office demanded absolute faithfulness. If a man betrayed his trust, the arrangement for the supervision of the Societies broke down at that point. It was necessary that each sheep in the fold should be counted; if one were missing, it must be sought until found. Even if it refused to be borne back, the wilderness of its wandering must be marked, and the loss reported. A man fit to do this work must have possessed, in a striking degree, the quality of faithfulness. That quality implies the sense of Responsibility. It is whispered that this is one of the lost senses of modern Christianity. Those who so whisper tell us that a habit of devolving our duties upon others is prevalent. The burdens which we ought to bear lie at our feet. We gather them together, make them up neatly, bind them securely, and then place them on the shoulders of other over-laden men. It is alleged that some not only refrain from "touching their burdens with one of their fingers," but stretch out that finger, and say, "See how many offices are heaped upon one man!" There was no lack of the sense of Responsibility in the early Class Leaders. They knew that they had to take care of each of their Members, and they acted upon that knowledge. They ascertained his spiritual condition. If absent from class, they visited him, and heard his "experience" at home. If absence arose from sickness, the fact was reported; if from wrong-doing and disinclination to receive rebuke, the Preacher was informed. By the faithfulness of the Leaders, Wesley's ideal of supervision was approached. Every Member in every

Class in every Society was seen and conversed with every week.

When we more closely examine the nature of the duties of the early Methodist Class Leader, we gain a further understanding of the "manner of man" he was required to be. He had to inquire into the spiritual condition of each Member of his Class, and to know how his soul prospered. Such inquiry is a delicate operation, and has to be conducted with great insight into character. If the condition is satisfactory, the process is brief. The joyous testimony is uttered with eagerness, and the tone of the voice and the brightness of the face tell of the health of the heart. But when the spiritual condition is unsatisfactory, the Leader's real difficulties begin. In such a case, a blunt question is apt to defeat its purpose. It provokes answers which conceal the inner self. Skill is required—skill which is the result of a knowledge of human nature, and an acquaintance with the innumerable temptations which assail the heart. Then, when the mischief is discovered, wisdom is required to apply the right remedy. Such ministry demands tact—that is, skill or adroitness in doing or saying exactly what is required by circumstances. It is necessary to remember the weakness as well as the wickedness of men. An unsatisfactory spiritual condition which is the result of weakness demands broad-hearted and broad-minded treatment. The man must be not only counselled, but consoled and strengthened. The Saviour spoke to men "as they were able to bear it." He knew precisely "what was in man," and, with a Divine compassion, He adapted His counsels to the mental and spiritual condition of

His hearers. Some of His insight and tenderness must be possessed by him who has to strengthen weak hands, and confirm feeble knees. Looks as well as voice must say to them that are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, fear not: behold your God will come and save you."

But, in some instances, it was the duty of the Leader not only to advise, but to reprove. Reproof was needed in cases of fault and sin; and it had to be judiciously varied and apportioned. If reproof is to be the oil which "the head will not refuse," it must be skilfully mixed and graciously administered. It must always be remembered that the object of reproof is to separate a man from his sins, and successful reproving indicates the possession of the wisdom with which souls are won. In the early days of Methodism the work of the reprover was perhaps easier than now. The men and women who gathered around the Class Leaders cultivated the capacity to receive reproof. In addition to meeting in Class, many of them met in "band," and one of the special objects of the Band Meeting was to find out the faults which disfigure character. Before any one was admitted to a "band," he was asked, amongst other questions, "Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plain and home? Do you desire that every one of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear, concerning you? Do you desire that in doing this we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?" Those who were accustomed to this stringent inquisition were easily reprov-  
ed. When loving eyes had discerned defects of character, kindly lips spoke words of condemnation and counsel, and



by humbling themselves, those who were rebuked were exalted. By exercise, the reprover learned his difficult art; and by submission, the reproved received the blessing which Jesus Christ has pronounced upon the meek.

There was one branch of the Class Leader's duty which must have taxed his resources to the uttermost. If conspicuously successful in its discharge, he must have been a remarkable man. In stating the reasons for changing the mode by which the Leader saw his Members once a week, Wesley points out that, in visiting from house to house, the Leader often found that one Member affirmed what another denied, and that "little misunderstandings and quarrels of various kinds frequently arose among relations or neighbours." By convening the Members in one place, disputants were brought face to face, and mutual explanations were given. The early Class Meeting was a very practical assembly. It was not altogether occupied with hymns, and prayers, and religious experience. The spirit of contention is fatal to a Methodist Society. When it appears, it has to be faced and cast out. The Class Meeting provided a fit occasion for the exorcism. Wesley tells us that "quarrels were made up and misunderstandings were removed." As most quarrels are misunderstandings, the Class Meeting provided an opportunity for statements which cleared away confusion, and restored peace. But the task of the Leader was heavy. The blessing on the peace-maker is hardly earned. He who would be proficient in the art of peace-making must not only have learned the proportions in which justice and mercy must be mingled, but in him patience must also "have her perfect work." Many a Leader must have assented

to Wesley's remark in his Journal when he had endeavoured to compose the "little differences which had much hurt the poor people" in one place: "O what zeal, what prudence and patience, are requisite to bear the manners of an untoward people, and to train them in Christian discipline, till they come to the full stature of Christ!"

In describing the meetings of the first "Society," Wesley tells us that they always concluded with prayer suitable to the several necessities of the Members. In speaking of the Class Meeting, he says: "After an hour or two spent in this labour of love, they concluded with praise and thanksgiving." These statements, which may be combined in their application to the Class Meeting, cast light upon the character of the men who conducted the proceedings of the little assemblies. The prayer for each one, "according to his several necessity," reminds us of the italicised portion of the "prayer for all conditions of men" in the Liturgy of the Church of England. Often when that is reached there is a solemn pause, and silent petitions steal upward for those who are "in any ways afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or estate." That bracketed portion of the Anglican formulary became part of the text of the closing prayer in the Methodist Class Meeting. ✓ With quick sympathy the Leader discerned the needs of his Members, and their case was presented to God. Many a weary, restless heart was soothed and quieted as the Leader pleaded, and the voices of the Members chimed "Amen."

The Members knew that these prayers for them as individuals were not confined to the Class-room. In private, having "shut the door," the Leader knelt with

his Class-paper before him. Name after name was presented to the "Father who seeth in secret;" case after case was described, and the petition was urged, "Supply all their need, according to Thy riches in glory by Christ Jesus!" Is it any wonder that those who knew that they were remembered by their Leader in the moments of his closest communion with God told him their "several necessities," opened their hearts to him, and trusted him to the uttermost?

But particular prayer for each Member was not all. Praise and thanksgiving closed the Class Meeting. How difficult that must have been sometimes! Not so much when persecution was fierce as when contention was rife. Many a Leader had cause to say with that sturdy Presbyterian, Oliver Heywood, "Oh, what a nest of wasps is the heart of man!" Buzzing and stinging are a poor prelude to thanksgiving; but, even under ordinary circumstances, it is not always easy to make people thankful. It was the duty of the Leader to kindle enthusiasm for the goodness of God, and the fire had to be taken from his own heart.

We cannot think that these provokers of praise were austere men. When they made "full inquiry into the behaviour of each person," when they administered "advice or reproof," when they strove to make peace between the contentious, we can well understand that their aspect was serious. But when the Class Meeting came to an end, the hand moved towards the hymn book, the leaves were turned with a gentle rustle, the little volume lay open at the section "For Believers Rejoicing;" then, with a face transfigured with the light of a thankful heart, the Leader looked up to heaven, and "gave out" the song of praise.

It was sung. <sup>4</sup> The singing perhaps was feeble at first ; but, as reluctant voices gradually joined in the strain, the fire began to burn, and the full measure of the music was expressed at last. When the Class broke up, the light was upon every face. It relieved the gloom of those who had been rebuked, it shone through the cloud of care which seemed to gather when the foot once more pressed the rough path of life ; and, when home was reached, it rayed forth again as the “ voice of rejoicing and salvation ” was heard “ in the tents of the righteous.”

The thanksgiving of the Methodist people has generally been of a practical character. It has frequently expressed itself in deeds of service and gifts of money. Both have been presented to God as a religious act. In the early Methodist Classes, and from the very beginning, weekly contributions were regularly collected. The moneys contributed were, in the very first instance, used for paying off the debt incurred by building a Preaching-House ; then they were applied for the relief of the poor. In 1743, the “ Rules of the Society ” state that the weekly contributions in the Classes are “ for the support of the Gospel,” and such has been their subsequent application. As we shall have to deal with the question of Class Meeting Finance in a separate chapter, we will reserve our remarks upon it. We mention the subject now, to complete our view of the duties of the first Class Leaders. Those duties were varied, they demanded very high moral and spiritual qualities for their discharge. It is no wonder that Wesley, acting through his “ Assistants,” kept the choice of Leaders in his own hands. Knowing how much depended upon them, was he not wise in appointing to the office only those “ in whom he could most confide ? ”

## CHAPTER III.

### THE RULES OF THE SOCIETY.

THE Class Leaders were assisted in their work by a small document which was placed in their hands, and also in the hands of each Member. It was a gauge of conduct, a standard of appeal, and it has deeply affected the character of the Methodist people. It was prepared by John Wesley when on a visit to Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1743; and it was entitled, "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kingswood, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne." The first edition, dated February 22nd, 1743, is signed by John Wesley. This standard of conduct was deliberately adopted. Having prepared the Rules, Wesley called the Newcastle Society together, and read them over carefully, desiring each Member to seriously consider whether "he was willing to conform thereto or no." The next day he began "visiting the Classes again, 'lest that which is lame should be turned out of the way.'"<sup>1</sup>

Having thus submitted his Rules to a practical test, he issued a second edition, dated May 1st, 1743. This and subsequent editions bore the name of Charles Wesley as a co-signatory. The Rules were speedily introduced into all the Societies.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. i. p. 414. All quotations are from the 8vo edition,

The manner of their introduction may be judged by the account which Wesley gives in his Journal of his proceedings in Ireland. Under the date August 12th, 1747, he tells us that, being in Dublin, he delayed examining the Classes till he had gone through the Rules of the Society, part of which he "explained to them at large, with the reason of them, every morning." After this exposition, the Members were examined, and, if they refused to obey the Rules, they had "no more place" in the Society.

In 1756, an eighth edition of the Rules was issued. On the 26th of August in that year, they had been the subject of special consultation in the Conference. About fifty Preachers assembled in Bristol, and, amongst other important business, the Rules of the Society were carefully considered "one by one." "But," says Wesley, "we did not find any that could be spared. So we all agreed to abide by them all, and to recommend them with all our might."<sup>1</sup> At least twenty-one editions of the Rules were issued in Wesley's lifetime, the last being dated 1790. It will, therefore, be seen that the Methodist standard of Christian conduct was not rashly selected. It was the outcome of mature and prolonged consideration; and, in the present day, it demands the serious attention of all who have to discharge the Class Leader's duties.

Substantially, the Rules which Wesley published are the same as those now in force. A few alterations have been made, and some explanatory words have been added; but we may safely take the Rules as they stand as those which were used by Wesley, his Preachers, and his Leaders to regulate

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. ii. p. 385.

the conduct of the Members of the early Methodist Societies.

We have already cited the one preliminary condition required in those who wished to enter the Society. They must have "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." It must be borne in mind that this was the condition of *admission*. What was the condition of *continuance*? In speaking of the "desire" which was the initial qualification for membership, the Rules say, "Wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits." It was expected that each Member should continue to show his desire for salvation. It was not enough to guard the gates against the incursion of unworthy intruders; the Society itself had to be defended from evils which would have destroyed its work as an association of Christian men and women, combined together to win and to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. Continuity of membership depended upon continuance in well-doing, upon the ceaseless pursuit of salvation from all sin.

The "Rules of the Society" are more than a collection of general principles of right and wrong-doing. They proceed to particulars, and they strike keen blows at special faults and sins. They were adapted to the times, and to the people to whom they were applied. No one knew the nation as Wesley knew it. By personal inspection, by the reports received from his Preachers, by listening to the "experience" of thousands of persons in all parts of the Kingdom, he gained an unparalleled insight into the moral and spiritual state of the English people. The Rules

reveal his estimate of that state. If in modern eyes some of them seem obsolete, that must be taken as a tribute to the power of the Evangelical Revival, of which Wesley was the chief instrument.

The practical character of the Rules will be best understood by submitting them to examination. In dealing with the question of the "fruits" which spring from a desire for salvation, Wesley says: "It is therefore expected of all who continue therein—*i.e.* in the Society—that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation, *First*, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind; and, *Secondly*, By doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men." Taking each of these statements in turn, Wesley descends to particulars, and mentions certain evils which must be avoided, and certain things which must be done. In dealing with the first point, he addresses himself especially to the evil which was "most generally practised." He does not profess to give a complete catalogue of offences against God and man. The "only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of faith and practice," was taught by God in His written Word. To that supreme standard he invariably appealed, and to it each Member of his Societies was required to submit. But for an immediately practical purpose, certain conspicuous sins were indicated, and against them the full force of the Rules was directed.

The first evil specified by the Rules is, "The taking the Name of God in vain." Since Wesley's day the tone of an Englishman's ordinary conversation has greatly improved. Still it is impossible, even now, to listen to the talk of the street without being shocked with the foul words that are recklessly and almost



unconsciously spoken. Sometimes it is difficult to believe that any real improvement has taken place during recent years. Familiarity with the literature and tone of the last century, however, serves to check despair. Then the air was heavy with blasphemy. All classes of society were infected with the vice. It became the characteristic of Englishmen. "Big oaths" not only disgraced soldiers and sailors, they resounded with but few exceptions wherever men did congregate. The typical Briton of the present French stage, who reels in his drunkenness and blurts out curses, is a sad survival of that immoral age. Against swearing in all its forms, Wesley steadfastly set his face. He wrote a tract, entitled "A Word to a Swearer,"<sup>1</sup> and it was distributed "with both hands earnestly." It is a fine specimen of close grappling with the conscience, and it must have produced great effect upon the national custom. Within his Societies, Wesley attacked the evil with an unsparing discipline. It may seem strange that swearing should have been possible upon Christian lips, but the character of many of the early Methodists before their conversion must be remembered. Thousands of them had been rescued from the grossest immoralities. There are some hymns in the first part of the Methodist Hymn Book which are now rarely heard. During the last century they were frequently sung. The Preacher, standing in the presence of Kingswood colliers, had no hesitation in crying,—

"Swearers, for you He spilt His blood."

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<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. xi. p. 167.

His heart rejoiced when he listened to the Leicester-shire miners, as they sang,—

“ Suffice that for the season past  
Hell’s horrid language filled our tongues ;  
We all Thy words behind us cast,  
And lewdly sang the drunkard’s songs.

“ But, O the power of grace divine !  
In hymns we now our voices raise,  
Loudly in strange hosannas join,  
And blasphemies are turned to praise.”

These hymns, originally written for Colliers, found their application in many audiences, and numbers of persons to whom their accusations applied crowded into the Societies. Under strong provocation they were apt to slide back into the old habit; and so Wesley hedged them about with sharp discipline, seeking in every way to make it difficult for them to break the command, “Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

The second place in Wesley’s list of the sins “most generally practised” by the nation is assigned to “profaning the day of the Lord.” That day was profaned “either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling.” It must not be forgotten that Methodism has exercised a determining influence upon the mode in which the Sabbath is kept in England. In 1618, James I. issued his famous Declaration, popularly called the “Book of Sports,” which signified his pleasure that on Sundays, after Divine Service, “no lawful recreation should be barred to his good people, which should not tend to the breach of the laws of his Kingdom, and the canons of his Church;” and from that time a constant controversy had been waged

concerning the proper method of observing the Lord's Day. Serious persons were shocked with the dancing, archery, leaping, vaulting, May-games, Whitsun-ales, morris-dances, and the setting up of Maypoles, which were the Sabbath sports legalised by the Royal will. When Charles I. republished the Declaration in 1633, and Archbishop Laud stringently enforced it, public opinion had so far matured that the King's act contributed to his downfall. When the Puritans triumphed, a strong reaction against Sabbath desecration set in. That reaction carried the nation into extremes of strictness. Then with the Restoration came a violent rebound. In that age of licence, as far as its practical effect was concerned, the fourth commandment might have been erased from the Decalogue.

When Wesley began to preach, the position of the Sabbath question was critical. In the Church, the controversy between the "Book of Sports" and the Puritan view of the Sabbath had reached the stage of compromise; and the compromise was somewhat in favour of the Puritan view, divested of its harsher features. The position of the ordinary orthodox Churchman is not unfairly indicated by the question which Wesley puts through the man to whom he appeals in his "Word to a Sabbath-breaker." He asks: "Where is the harm if, after church, I spend the remainder of the day in the fields, or in a public house, or in taking a little diversion?"<sup>1</sup> It must be admitted that such a mode of spending "the remainder of the day" shows a decided advance upon the position occupied by a Laudean Churchman.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. xi. p. 166.

When we turn from the Church to the nation at large, we find the spirit of the Book of Sports triumphant. Wesley in his ridings hither and thither looked at Englishmen with calm eyes, and saw no reason to doubt the conclusion of Fletcher, of Madeley: "Our national depravity turns greatly on these two hinges, the profanation of the Lord's Day and the neglect of the education of children." The former cause had been pointed out by an Anglican dignitary. Dr. Gibson, the Bishop of London, declared: "It is a common observation that public criminals, when they come to their unhappy end, and make their dying declarations to the world, generally charge the sinful courses in which they have lived to the neglect and abuse of the Lord's Day, as the first occasion of leading them into all other wickedness. And, considering how frequently these declarations are repeated, and how many other instances of the same kind, though less public, are notorious enough to those who will observe them, they may well be a warning to us to consider a religious observation of the Lord's Day as the best preservative of virtue and religion, and the neglect and profanation of it as the greatest inlet to vice and wickedness."<sup>1</sup> Wesley thoroughly agreed with the closing remarks of the Bishop's statement. He determined to secure the "religious observance" of the whole of the Lord's Day. He not only set himself against the prevailing theory that "a Sabbath well spent" consisted of morning prayers and diversion, he defended the day against all intrusions of the secular spirit. He did not labour in vain. He produced decisive results in the Church and the

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. xi. p. 335.

nation. In carefully guarded words, Abbey says: "Owing in part to the direct or indirect operations of the Methodist and Evangelical movements, and in part to alarm at what seemed a growing inclination among the careless to make Sunday a mere day of pleasure, feeling among serious and religious people became now far more unanimous in favour of the stricter view."<sup>1</sup> The change in the sentiments of the nation was demonstrated in 1781, when a Bill was introduced into the House of Commons prohibiting the use of places for public entertainment or public debate on the Lord's Day, where people were admitted by the payment of money. The Bill was passed in the Lower House without a division, and by a majority of twenty-six in the House of Lords. Such legislation would have been impossible at the beginning of the century. When the modern Englishman escapes from the work and worry of the week, and refreshes himself in the light of the "day of rest and gladness," he ought to gratefully acknowledge his obligations to John Wesley and the Evangelical Revival.

The middle of the eighteenth century is regarded by the ecclesiastical historian as the time when irreligion and immorality reached their climax in England.<sup>2</sup> Innumerable vices abounded, but there was one that overshadowed them all. It was the national curse of drunkenness. The literature of the period testifies to the universal prevalence of this evil. Unfortunately, the attitude of the public mind towards this degrading vice served to spread and to perpetuate it. Among the aristocracy and the wealthy

<sup>1</sup> *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii. p. 518.

<sup>2</sup> *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii. p. 46.

classes, a man was not disgraced by his habit of drinking to excess. Among the middle classes the evil was so common that passers-by scarcely noticed the drunken citizen as he lurched through the narrow streets, and stumbled into the kennel. His eccentric course excited little attention, and less comment. The working men were brutalised beyond expression. Without education, morality, or religion, their refuge was the ale-bench; and there they drank themselves into temporary forgetfulness of the misery of a life without God and without hope. Everywhere self-respect was perishing; everywhere conscience was weary of uttering unheeded reproaches. Earnest clergymen, painfully conscious of the plague that was consuming the nation, sought in vain for a remedy. In 1753, Archbishop Secker declared that "immorality and irreligion were grown almost beyond ecclesiastical power." This note of despair was sounded again and again; "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for expectation of those things which were coming on" the land.

It was at this crisis, when England was drifting towards irretrievable ruin, that John Wesley was sent by a merciful God to prevent national destruction. He was armed with something more mighty than "ecclesiastical power." In the strength of Him by whom He had been sent, Wesley attacked every form of evil; and the effect of his work remains. To him the present reformation in the drinking customs of the country must be traced. He cast to the winds the light manner of treating drunkenness. He had read in Holy Scripture that "neither fornicators, nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor revilers, shall inherit the

kingdom of God;” and that text kindled his zeal to a white heat. His “Word to a Drunkard”<sup>1</sup> startles us by its vehemence of accusation and appeal. Its plain speaking must have astounded the men who considered drunkenness “a gentlemanly vice.” In this tract, Wesley throws away the scabbard. Whatever his station, the drunkard is arraigned as a public enemy, an enemy of God and of His Christ. His only course was to repent; to see and feel himself a wretch, to cry to God for mercy, to hasten to the blood of sprinkling, and then go and sin no more.

When the drunkard was converted, and became a member of the Methodist Society, he found himself under a system of discipline which laid an iron hand upon his master-passion. Drinking to excess was absolutely forbidden. In the true sense of the word, Methodism was a Society for the promotion of Temperance. In one particular, it was a total abstinence society. The drinking of drams, that is of *neat spirits*, was prohibited “unless in cases of extreme necessity.” The wretchedness produced by dram-drinking is vividly painted by Hogarth in one of his best known pictures. The desolating habit was rife during the last century in Great Britain and Ireland. The Rules emphatically condemn the vice. Wesley, in his sermons and correspondence, accentuates that condemnation. Drams were “liquid fire,” “sure but slow poison;” they sapped “the very springs of life.” In his standard sermon on “The Use of Money,”<sup>2</sup> he fiercely denounces the sale of drams. By the discipline he exercised in his Societies, by his utterances in the pulpit and the

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. xi. p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. vi. p. 129.

press, by his private letters he fought the evil with unwavering courage. Gradually a change was effected in public sentiment. Men began to be ashamed of their lack of self-control. Those who spoke of drunkenness ventured to call it by its right name, laying aside those phrases under which it seemed to lose "half its evil by losing all its grossness." In the process of the years the ideas of Wesley have become the possession of England. The opinions in favour of sobriety which now prevail in all ranks of society are those which were planted in the minds of men during the last century by the greatest of the English evangelists.

We have dwelt at some length upon the three sins which Wesley places at the head of the catalogue of evils "most generally practised." In dealing with the remainder of the black list, it will only be necessary to emphasise and explain a few sentences which are not as clearly understood now as when they were first written. The paragraph which prohibits "fighting, quarrelling, and brawling" also gives directions as to law disputes. In the first, and in several subsequent editions of the Rules, "going to law" was absolutely forbidden. This was a "hard saying," a command impossible to be kept. Wesley himself found that it was necessary to defend his people against savage mobs by appealing to the Court of the King's Bench when justice was denied by the local magistracy, a portion of the "Yearly Collection" being applied to meet the costs of such appeals. The "Rule" was therefore altered to its present form. It forbids members of the Society from commencing actions against each other in Courts of Law. We



have seen that disputes which arose "between brother and brother" were settled in the Class Meeting, the Class Leader being the arbitrator between the disputants. Every effort was made to prevent public scandal. The little Societies were "watched by the world's malignant eye," and whilst strict discipline was exercised upon inconsistent members, great care was taken to defend the cause of Christ against the reproaches which would have assailed it if such inconsistencies had been made the subject of public discussion. The reader of the Rules will not fail to note that "the using many words in buying or selling" is regarded as a form of "brawling."

The next prohibition, which relates to the buying or selling of "uncustomed goods," fortunately requires a word of explanation. The Rule is directed against Smuggling. That evil was rife in Wesley's day, and it was a long time before he could convince his Societies of the harmfulness of the practice. He attacked the evil with his pen. His "Word to a Smuggler"<sup>1</sup> is a sententious tract. He takes a broad view of the question. After dealing with one obvious aspect of the case, he says of Smuggling: "It is a general robbery. It is, in effect, not only robbing the King, but robbing every honest man in the nation; for the more the King's duties are diminished, the more the taxes must be increased. And these lie upon us all; they are the burden, not of some, but of all the people of England. Therefore every smuggler is a thief-general, who picks the pockets both of the King and all his fellow-subjects. He wrongs them all, and above all, the honest traders, many of whom he

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. xi. p. 174.

deprives of their maintenance, constraining them either not to sell their goods at all, or to sell them to no profit. Some of them are tempted hereby, finding they cannot get bread for their families, to turn thieves too. And then you are accountable for their sin as well as your own; you bring their blood upon your own head. Calmly consider this, and you will never more ask, what harm there is in smuggling?" Such arguments made a direct appeal to the men to whom they were addressed, and assisted to abate a very serious evil.

But Wesley was not content with writing against smuggling; he discovered the smugglers in his Societies, and cut them off. The practice tainted more especially the towns and villages near the sea. Wesley considered the numbers concerned in smuggling upon the coasts was "far greater than can be imagined."<sup>1</sup> His Journals and correspondence attest his zeal against the evil. The trenchant manner in which he dealt with the matter may be judged from the directions which he gave to Joseph Benson in 1776. Wesley says: "Begin in the Name of God, and go through with the work. If only six will promise you to sin no more, leave only six in the Society. You must, at all events, tear up this evil by the roots."<sup>2</sup> He himself set an example to his Assistants. Visiting a northern town, he says: "I met the Society, and told them plain none could stay with us unless he would part with all sin, particularly robbing the King, selling or buying run goods, which I could no more suffer than robbing on the highway. This I enforced on every member the next day. A few would not

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. viii. p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. xii. p. 408.

promise to refrain, so these I was forced to cut off. About two hundred and fifty were of a better mind.”<sup>1</sup> The vigorous action of Wesley, and the powerful influence of Methodism, assisted, doubtless, in later years by the alterations which have been made in the Tariff, and the effect of Free Trade, at last told upon this popular evil. In the present day, the practice in its more pronounced forms has well-nigh disappeared. In many parts of our southern and western coasts, if “the oldest inhabitants” are asked the reason for the disappearance of smuggling, they have only one answer, “Methodism.” One Rule of the Society has, without doubt, done its work thoroughly—the Rule which prohibits “the buying or selling of uncustomed goods.”

The next Rule relates to “the giving or taking things on usury.” After the first edition of the Rules, usury was explained as “unlawful interest.” Jonathan Crowther, the elder, says that this Rule “was made against giving or taking things in pawn, and that was before pawnbroking was legalised by Act of Parliament.”<sup>2</sup>

An addition was also made to the following Rule in the fourth edition. Originally, “uncharitable or unprofitable conversation” was forbidden; but, in 1744, the words “especially speaking evil of ministers or those in authority” were appended. Subsequently the word “magistrates” was substituted for “those in authority,” and the Rule attained its present form. The “ministers” referred to were the clergy of the Church of England, and the relation of the magistrates to the Methodists may be judged from the fact that

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. ii. p. 413.

<sup>2</sup> *Portraiture of Methodism*, p. 254, second edition.

appeals had frequently to be made against them to the Court of the King's Bench. But Wesley forbade all uncharitable conversation about the persecutors of the early Methodists. In this, as in other respects, he submitted to his own canon. With an ingenuity which still continues to excite our surprise, he discovered excuses for his ecclesiastical and magisterial antagonists; and when his sense of honesty rebelled against such excuses, he did his best to hold his tongue. If that became impossible, he constrained himself to utter no remark which sinned against the law of an enlightened charity. Of set purpose he strove with all his might to prevent the alienation of his Societies from the Established Church; and one of the methods which he employed is shown in the Rule which forbids "speaking evil of ministers." It cannot, however, be forgotten that, in their public addresses, the ministers in question often spoke uncharitably of the Methodist Preachers and people.

The list of evils "most generally practised" concludes with an application of Christ's "golden rule" to all unenumerated acts of wrong-doing. The members of the Methodist Societies were prohibited from "doing to others as we would not they should do unto us." The range of this Rule is immense, and covers "evil in every kind."

It must ever be borne in mind that the sins which are specified in "the Rules of the Society" are only indicated by way of example. If a man committed a sin which is not mentioned in the Rules, he could not plead that silence in extenuation of his conduct. Much less could he refuse obedience to Methodist discipline because the particular sin he

had committed was not to be found in the list. The Rules do not particularly forbid murder. Clearly that omission does not permit a Methodist to kill. Wesley knew that his Rules were subordinate to the one standard which he himself implicitly obeyed. That standard was God's written Word, which, as the Rules themselves say, is "the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice."

After dealing with the more striking forms of evil, the Rules proceed to the regions of the individual conscience, and prohibit those things which we know are not "for the glory of God." Three specimens are given. First, "the putting on of gold, or costly apparel." It would be a mistake to suppose that Wesley encouraged his people to be careless about their attire. All the evidence points in the opposite direction. To one of his Preachers he writes: "Whatever clothes you wear, let them be whole; no rents, no tatters, no rags. Mend your clothes, or I shall never expect you to mend your lives. Let none ever see a ragged Methodist."<sup>1</sup> In his sermon "On Dress," he insists that "slovenliness is no part of religion;" and he quotes with approval George Herbert's lines,—

"Let thy mind's sweetness have its operation  
Upon thy person, clothes, and habitation."

He did more than condemn slovenliness. By example and precept he recommended neatness of apparel. He himself was a scrupulously well-dressed man; and, although objecting to the particularity and

<sup>1</sup> *Methodist Magazine*, 1784, p. 165.

the expensiveness of the Quaker costume, he advised his people to imitate its neatness and plainness. The characteristic reasonableness of Wesley also led him to see and to say that there ought to be a difference "in the apparel of Christians;" the dress of the master or the mistress should differ from that of the servant, and that of persons in different stations in life should vary in accordance with their social position. As to those in supreme authority, their immediate attendants, magistrates, and officers, he held that the Scriptures did not forbid their being arrayed in gold and costly apparel.

What then is the meaning of the prohibition contained in the Rules? The illuminating phrase in the sentence is, "what we know is not for the glory of God." The matter was referred to the conscience, and Wesley took care that the consciences of his people were well instructed. He taught them their duty towards their neighbours, and especially towards the poor and suffering. Travelling over the country, he became intimately acquainted with the social condition of its inhabitants, and he made known that condition to his Societies, and appealed to them for help. He knew that thousands of people were living and dying in abject misery, and the sheen of gold, and the rustle of splendid apparel brought their sorrowful face before him.

Wesley's early experience had taught him a lesson which he never forgot. "Many years ago," he says, "when I was at Oxford, on a cold winter's day, a young maid (one of those we kept at school) called upon me. I said, 'You seem half starved. Have you nothing to cover you but that thin linen gown?' She

said, 'Sir, this is all I have!' I put my hand in my pocket, but found I had scarce any money left, having just paid away what I had. It immediately struck me, Will thy Master say, 'Well done, good and faithful steward! thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold?' O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid?"<sup>1</sup>

This incident moved the deeps of his heart. He relates it in his sermon "On Dress," and it points his strongest argument against superfluity of attire and ornament. He cries, "When you are laying out that money in costly apparel, which you could have otherwise spared for the poor, you thereby deprive them of what God, the proprietor of all, had lodged in your hands for their use. If so, what you put upon yourself you are, in effect, tearing from the back of the naked; as the costly and delicate food which you eat, you are snatching from the mouth of the hungry. For mercy, for pity, for Christ's sake, for the honour of His Gospel, stay your hand! Do not throw this money away! Do not lay out on nothing, yea, worse than nothing, what may clothe your poor, naked, shivering fellow-creature!"<sup>2</sup> We must read the Rule against "the putting on of gold or costly apparel" in the light of Wesley's tender pity for the poor.

Wesley's reasonableness is strikingly shown in his treatment of the difficult question of diversions. The Rules forbid "the taking of such diversions as cannot be used in the Name of the Lord Jesus." But Wesley was no sour ascetic. He admits in his sermon on

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. vii. p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. vii. p. 20.

"The more Excellent Way" that we cannot always be intent on business, and that both our bodies and minds require some relaxation. He was no enemy of innocent diversion. Of field sports, he says: "Let those who have nothing better to do still run foxes and hares out of breath," and he casts the choice of other diversions upon the conscience of his hearers. That was his main point. Each man for himself had to ask, "Can this diversion be used in the Name of the Lord Jesus?" It must be confessed that such a test condemned most of the diversions in vogue during the last century. One of the chief diversions of the period was found in theatrical performances. Overton says: "The stage, if it was a little improved since the wild days of the Restoration, was yet so bad that even a lax moralist like Lord Hervey was obliged to own, in 1737, 'the present great licentiousness of the stage did call for some restraint and regulation.'"<sup>1</sup> Wesley bluntly styles the English theatre "the sink of all profaneness and debauchery."<sup>2</sup> A similar testimony might be borne against most of the amusements of the period. It was of the utmost importance that the Methodist people should be warned against diversions that would have tainted their purity and ruined their peace.

The subject next touched by the Rules is intimately associated with that of diversions, namely, "The singing those songs or reading those books which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God."

Those who are acquainted with the condition of literature during the last century will not wonder at

<sup>1</sup> *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii. p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. vii. p. 34.



the firm stand which Wesley took against the books that poured from a licentious press. Overton, speaking of the literature of that day, says: "Notwithstanding the improvement which such writers as Addison and Steele had effected, it was still very impure. Let us take the evidence of the kindly and well-informed Sir Walter Scott. 'We should do great injustice to the present day by comparing our manners with those of the reign of George I. The writings even of the most esteemed poets of that period contain passages which now would be accounted to deserve the pillory. Nor was the tone of conversation more pure than that of composition; for the taint of Charles II.'s reign continued to infect society until the present reign [George III.], when, if not more moral, we are at least more decent.'"<sup>1</sup> The novels that were written were, for the most part, mirrors of the age; they reflected only too accurately the national manners, and the reading of many of them certainly would not tend to increase "the knowledge and love of God." It is well known that Wesley did not forbid all imaginative literature. He himself edited a work of fiction. But he insisted upon discrimination and conscientiousness in the choice of the songs that were sung, and the books that were read by way of diversion.

The section of the Rules dealing with "evil of every kind" closes with prohibitory sentences directed against sundry vices, concerning which it is only necessary to explain that the Rule against "borrowing without a probability of paying, or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them," does not appear in the first edition. It was added at a later period;

<sup>1</sup> *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii. p. 45.

and if this Rule were universally observed, it would revolutionise English commerce.

After forbidding evil, the Rules proceed thus to a second branch of Christian conduct :—"It is expected of all who continue in these Societies that they should continue to evidence their desire for salvation by doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power ; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men." It was the duty of the Methodist to dedicate his life to the service of others. The doctrines of Methodism which insisted upon individual salvation, if they had stood alone, might have produced self-centred devotees, consumed with anxiety to escape personal perdition. But those doctrines did not stand alone. Wesley invariably maintained that Methodism was an attempt to secure obedience to the two great commands of Christ, and he insisted upon the duty of loving our neighbour as ourself.

As a matter of fact, Methodism became a form of universal philanthropy. It initiated most of the benevolent enterprises existing in England to-day. Indeed, it saw beyond our narrow seas. The command to do good "of every possible sort," and to do good to "all men" fired the hearts of those who projected our Foreign Missions. The early Methodists, like Wesley, looked upon all the world as their parish. It must be noted that the Rules contemplate very diversified modes of doing good. Wesley's direction to his "Assistants" and "Helpers," "You have nothing to do but to save souls," has been somewhat harshly criticised. Two things have been overlooked. First, the counsel is given to "Assistants" and "Helpers" in an age of intense

evangelistic effort. It was never intended as an exhaustive definition of ministerial duty. Secondly, the critics seem to have a narrow conception of what is meant by "the salvation of the soul." That salvation includes deliverance from selfishness, meanness, the love of money, and everything that hinders love for other men. When the Preacher's exhortation had created "a desire to flee from the wrath to come" in the heart of a convinced sinner, he sought to enter the Society. When admitted, he found himself in the presence of very broad views as to the meaning of salvation. He had not only to be assured of his own safety, but also to evidence his fitness for membership by constant largeness of heart. He had to relate his "experience" in Class; but he had also to give food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, and he had to visit or help those who were sick or in prison.

Wesley laid very great stress upon the discharge of these duties. The "bodies" of men were the objects of his care. He consistently and continuously denied himself that he might relieve the physical necessities of the poor. He had read the meaning of that description of the Judgment Day given by Him who shall then be the Judge, which reveals the fact that the "Great Assize" will not exclusively regard spiritual experiences. In that dread day much account will be taken of famished, ill-clothed, sick, and miserable men, women, and children; and the measure of our real love for Christ will be judged by the amount of help we have given to them. Upon this fact the Rules get a firm hold. They place "doing good to the bodies of men" in a position of special prominence, and Methodism will lose its ancient spirit and will

abandon its position amongst the Churches if it forgets this part of its mission.

But Methodism is more than philanthropy. Its commission is directed not only to the bodies, but also to the souls of men. The character of the age in which Wesley's work was done must be remembered. At the beginning of the last century, as Mr. Gladstone said in the *British Quarterly Review* (July 1879), "The preaching of the Gospel had disappeared not by denial, but by lapse, from the majority of Anglican pulpits." Where Christ was preached, "He was but little and but coldly preached." And yet the Anglican clergy were supposed to be the special custodians of the doctrines which concerned salvation, and they claimed the exclusive right to pronounce those doctrines by their own lips. The liberty of prophesying did not belong to the laity, and, as a rule, they were dumb in the presence of abounding wickedness. Mr. Gladstone describes the Evangelical movement as "a strong, systematic, outspoken, and determined reaction against the prevailing standards both of life and preaching. It aimed at bringing back, on a large scale, and by an aggressive movement, the Cross, and all that the Cross essentially implies, both into the teaching of the clergy and into the lives as well of the clergy, as of the laity." More than this, it also produced a reaction in some quarters against the doctrine of the exclusive right of the clergy to reprove a sinner, and instruct him in the way of salvation. It was the special glory of Methodism that it put the Gospel upon the lips of all its converts, and commissioned each one to testify against sin and to witness for Christ. The union of universal

philanthropy with universal evangelisation formed a matchless force for the conversion of England and the world.

Methodism did not seek to take its converts out of the world. It wished to retain them there, that they might save the world. In the vast majority of cases they had to keep to their business, and they were commanded to display all diligence and frugality therein. Wesley strongly objected to lazy Methodists. With laziness, in any form, he had no patience, and he was especially annoyed when a man neglected his daily calling on the plea of attending religious services. The Gospel was not to be blamed. Those who made fervency of spirit and diligence in business mutually destructive forces came under Methodist discipline. It will be easily understood that at the outset the witness-bearing of the Methodists exposed them to worldly loss. Customers who came into a shop for tea or sugar, and received in addition a rebuke for profane language, would not be likely to come again. Indeed the silent protest of the godly life was sufficient to drive away those who "loved darkness rather than light." It became a common thing for the Methodist tradesman to be threatened with commercial disaster. It was no wonder, therefore, that the Rules point out that one form of doing good is to be found in supporting those whose business was threatened because of their religion. It was necessary that the Methodists should form a kind of Co-operative Society, and safeguard themselves against bankruptcy. They were exhorted, however, to suffer their losses in the best spirit. They were to deny themselves, to take up the Cross daily, to submit to bear the reproach of Christ,

“to be as the filth and offscouring of the world;” and to expect “that men should say all manner of evil against them, falsely, for the Lord’s sake.”

The third and final branch of Christian Conduct dealt with by the Rules concerns “the ordinances of God.” It was expected of all who wished to continue in the Societies that they should evidence their desire of salvation “by attending upon all the ordinances of God: such are, the public worship of God; the ministry of the Word, either read or expounded; the Supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting or abstinence.” When the Rules were first published, obedience to them, in the majority of instances, involved attendance at the parish churches, where suddenly increased congregations and multitudes of communicants testified to the power of the Evangelical Revival. When, through the stress of circumstances, the Methodists were driven away from the Establishment, obedience to the Rules led them to attend the public services in their own Preaching-Houses, and to receive the Lord’s Supper at the hands of Wesley, his assistant clergymen, and those Preachers whom he appointed to administer the sacraments.

As to the more private “ordinances,” it is significant that “family prayer” is an addition to the sentence as it appears in the first edition of the Rules. It is not difficult to suggest a reason. The mission of Methodism at the outset was to the individual. It frequently happened that one member of a family, listening to the field-preacher, was convinced of sin and converted to God. He soon found out the truth of that prophecy, “A man’s foes shall be

those of his own household." In such circumstances, family prayer was often impracticable. But as Methodism spread, and time went on, the "Great Revival" influenced heads of households and entire families. The country was dotted over with Christian homes. Then in "lone" farm-house, in village and town and city, in the morning and evening, and sometimes at noon, the voice of singing and reading and prayer was heard. Sometimes a neighbour joined the family circle, and listened to the truths of God's Book, and knelt with those who did not forget to pray for him at the Throne of Grace. Refreshed by fellowship with God, and with each other, they went forth to their work in the morning; and at night, lay down to rest with the "reconciling word" upon their lips, and the music of the evening hymn whispering in their heart. It is impossible to estimate the influence upon the country of the daily prayers of the Methodist people. Throughout the land "the spirit of grace and of supplication" was poured out; and, in answer to ceaseless prayer, the guilty nation looked on Him whom they had pierced, and mourned for Him; and in that day of deep repentance it saw that a fountain was opened "for sin and for uncleanness."

We have said that the Rules assisted the Leaders in their work. They were the standard of appeal in all cases of conduct. It was only so long as a member observed them that he could continue in the Society. If the Rules were disregarded, if they were broken, then the Leader, after expostulating with the transgressor, reported his case to Wesley, or his Assistant. Upon receiving the report, Wesley or the Preacher in his name, admonished the wrong-

doer of the error of his way, and waited for a while to watch the effect of the admonition. If it failed, the Rule-breaker was cut off from the Society. In this way, in which firmness was tempered with tenderness, the authority of the Rules was sustained, and the discipline of Methodism became a mighty force in promoting the religion and morals of the English people.

To us it seems unaccountable that writers upon Methodism should have overlooked the "Rules of the Society" when descanting upon "the ethical side of the Evangelical Revival." Even a kindly critic like Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, can say but little in praise of Methodism in the sphere of morals. Indeed he thinks the Evangelical Revival, "in its moral aims and achievements," has proved to be "seriously defective." Searching for the cause of this defectiveness, he says: "The explanation is not far to seek. The great aim of the Revival was to rescue men from eternal perdition. To the Leaders of the Revival, the difference between the saved and the unsaved was infinite. They were dragging men from a burning house; they were landing them from a sinking ship; when their converts were beyond the reach of the devouring flame and the raging sea, their great work was done. Of course, they insisted on the obligation of the ordinary virtues,—the virtues which were recognised by the common conscience of their times, —and these virtues were placed under the sanction of the authority of God, and the judgment to come. But the Revival had no ethical originality."<sup>1</sup>

We wish that Dr. Dale had glanced over the "Rules

<sup>1</sup> *The Evangelical Revival, etc.*, p. 34.



of the Society" before he wrote this paragraph. He would have seen that instead of considering that "their great work was done" when a man was landed from the sinking ship, the Leaders in the Revival thought that it had only begun. Saved from "the wrath to come," the converts had "to be saved from their sins;" and the Rules met them constantly as tests of the progress of that salvation. When we consider the moral condition of the nation in the first half of the last century, we are at a loss to understand what Dr. Dale means when he says that the virtues insisted on by the Methodist Leaders were those which were recognised by "the common conscience of their times." The "common conscience" was insensible to the evils which the Rules declare to be those "most generally practised." It is scarcely too much to say that the Leaders in the great Revival had to create a "Christian conscience" in their hearers. That the awakened and educated conscience perceived and approved of the virtues insisted upon by Wesley and his Preachers is certain; but to say this is far from asserting that the "common conscience of their times" approved of them. It so far disapproved that any strictness in morals was sure to expose a man to remark, and to the charge that he was "a Methodist." If a man became such a severe moralist that he denounced "harmless" swearing and the "gentlemanly vice" of drunkenness, then he became the object of furious persecution. Mobs led sometimes by clergymen, who too often were incarnations of the "common conscience of their times," assailed those who pretended to be "better than their neighbours;" and the horse-pond was the reward of

fearless witnessing.<sup>1</sup> We are not anxious to defend the Evangelical Revival against the charge that it "had no ethical originality." Its moral code was found in the written Word of God, "the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice." Attempts at "ethical originality" have not hitherto been fortunate, and we can only express our gratitude that the Leaders in the great Revival eschewed them.

The bearing of the Rules on national morality is well illustrated by the following incident. In 1771, a woman whom John Nelson had dismissed from the Society, about twelve months before, for misbehaviour, stood charged at the York assizes with a capital crime. John Nelson, being at that time in the York circuit, was subpoenaed to appear at the Crown bar to assign his reasons for having put this woman out of the Methodist Society. He read the "Rules of the Society" in Court; and at the end of that Rule which forbids contracting a debt without any probable way of paying it, he stopped, and said: "My lord, this was my reason for dismissing this woman from the Society to which I belong." The judge arose, and said: "Good morality, Mr. Nelson." Being seated again, he desired that the rest of the Rules should be read to him. After hearing them, his lordship said emphatically to the Court: "Gentlemen, this is true Christianity!"

<sup>1</sup> See Wesley's *Journal*, April 3rd, 1752. Thomas Mitchell in the horse-pond at Wrangle.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE METHODIST CLASS MEETING AND THE METHODIST CHURCH.

THE description of the origin and character of the Class Meeting, which we have taken mainly from the "Rules of the Society" and the writings of Wesley, enables us to perceive its position and function in the Methodist organisation. It is essential that we should get clear views upon this subject, as recent discussions have tended to confound things that differ. We have been repeatedly informed that "the Class Meeting is the condition of membership in the Methodist Society." Against this, we may safely put the assertion of the Rules:—"There is one only condition previously required of those who desire admission into these Societies, viz. a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and be saved from their sins." As to continuance in the Society, we have seen that those who wish to continue in the Society have to give evidence of the permanence of their desire for salvation by obeying the Rules. Fitness for membership is regarded from an exclusively spiritual standpoint. If we bear these facts in mind, we shall be delivered from the delusion that Wesley mistook a human for a Divine institution, and that he

made a human institution the standard of fitness for membership in the Church of Christ.

Wesley was quite aware of the objections which could be levelled against the Class Meeting. He states and discusses them with pellucid wisdom. In his "Plain Account of the People called Methodists," he shows that the new arrangement was not introduced and established without criticism. Some persons, viewing the Class Meeting in "a wrong point of light," saw in it a restraint instead of an invaluable privilege. "They disliked it on that account, because they did not love to be restrained in anything." Then there were some who were "ashamed to speak before company." Others honestly said, "I do not know why, but I do not like it." Passing from these objectors, Wesley turns towards those who asserted, "There were no such meetings when I came into the Society first, and why should there now? I do not understand these things, and this changing one thing after another continually." To these he replies, "It is a pity but they had been at first. But we knew not then either the need or the benefit of them. Why we use them, you will readily understand if you read over the "Rules of the Society." That, with regard to these little prudential helps, we are continually changing one thing after another is not a weakness or fault, as you imagine, but a peculiar advantage which we enjoy. By this means, we declare them all to be merely prudential, not essential, not of Divine institution . . . We are always open to instruction, willing to be wiser every day than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better." To the more serious

criticism, "There is no Scripture for this, for Classes and I know not what," Wesley answered, "(1) There is no Scripture against it. You cannot show one text that forbids them. (2) There is much Scripture for it, even all those texts which enjoin the substance of those various duties, whereof this is only an indifferent circumstance, to be determined by reason and experience. (3) You seem not to have observed that the Scripture, in most points, gives only general rules, and leaves the particular circumstances to be adjusted by the common sense of mankind."<sup>1</sup> It will be seen by the above quotations that Wesley considered the Class Meeting a "prudential arrangement," dictated by common sense and approved by experience; and that it was created and preserved for the purpose of applying the general rules of Scripture to "particular occasions." In other words, the Class Meeting was instituted as a means of ascertaining the fitness of candidates for membership who professed to desire salvation; and the fitness of persons who wished to continue their membership in the Methodist Society. The moral and spiritual fitness was the condition of membership; the Class Meeting provided opportunities for ascertaining whether it existed and continued. This will be clear to the "teachably intelligent" readers of the "Rules of the Society."

Has a Church a right to adopt methods for testing the spiritual fitness of those who ask to be admitted to membership? It is strange that an answer should be required to such a question. But recent discussions about the Class Meeting have shown that there are some Methodists who have placed that question on

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. viii. p. 254.

their list of moot-points; and Dr. Dale tells us that some Congregationalists hold that, inasmuch as "the ultimate responsibility for the sincerity of a profession of Christian faith must always rest with the man who makes it . . . application for admission into the Church should be accepted as an adequate proof that the applicant is, in the deep and real sense of the word, a Christian."<sup>1</sup>

The view so clearly stated by Dr. Dale makes a man's own conscience the judge of his fitness for Church membership. With the decree of that conscience none must intermeddle. We presume that the permanency of membership would depend upon the continued approval of conscience; and that when that approval ceased, the person would excommunicate himself. In this most practical world, where imperfect consciences abound, we fear that this test of membership would be inadequate. It is admirable as a source of consolation to those who, separate from earthly communions, claim to belong to the invisible Church; but, as a working principle, it is doomed to fail.

As we prefer a practical to a theoretical discussion of the question which concerns the right and expediency of testing fitness for Church membership, we will try to learn from existing examples. It will be admitted that, if such testing is inexpedient, Churches have had ample opportunity of discovering their mistake, and of discarding a discredited method. Do the principal Churches of England admit Members without attempting to ascertain their spiritual condition? Do they allow persons to continue to enjoy their rights as

<sup>1</sup> *Manual of Congregational Principles*, p. 166.

Members of whose moral and spiritual state they are ignorant? We will put and answer these questions in respect of two widely differing religious communities, the Episcopal and Congregational Churches.

The theory that, as a State Church, all Englishmen are Episcopalians, need not detain us. Viewed as a spiritual organisation, there are few unpolemical clergymen who would care to contend that their Church consists of such a miscellaneous assemblage of unknown persons. The revival of the spiritual life in the Anglican Church, which has been such a marked incident in the latter half of this century, has led earnest clergymen to face facts. Discerning that the Church of Christ is not an undisciplined mob, but a well-ordered community, they have resolved to realise the ideal that shone before the eyes of saintly Englishmen in other days. The sign of fitness for membership in the Anglican Church is the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the communicant. But, before such administration, the ecclesiastical authorities have directed that the fitness shall be unmistakeably ascertained. It is well known that confirmation is the prelude to the sacrament. The rubric at the end of "The Order of Confirmation" is, "And there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion until such time as he is confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed." Confirmation is preceded by instruction in creed and catechism, in Christian doctrine and conduct. Theoretically, no person is confirmed unless the clergyman who is responsible for him is ready to answer for his fitness for the reception of the rite. That fitness consists in his being prepared to take upon himself the vows made

by his god-parents at his baptism; and the whole ceremony indicates that an open profession of Christianity is essential. There can be no doubt that "first communion" is a sign that, in the opinion of the clergyman, its recipient is fit for membership in the Christian Church.

It may, however, be asked if the Anglican Church makes any provision for ascertaining the continued spiritual fitness of its Members. It must be borne in mind that all Members of that Church are bound by ecclesiastical law to communicate, at the least, three times in the year. When the sacrament is to be administered, then, according to the rubric, as many as intend to communicate must signify their names to the Curate at least some time the day before. When the names are sent in, the clergyman has to determine whether the applicants are proper persons to receive the sacrament. He founds his decision on public and private knowledge. If any is "an open and notorious evil liver," or has done wrong to his neighbours by word or deed so that the congregation is thereby offended, "the Curate, having knowledge thereof, should call him, and advertise him, that in anywise he presume not to come to the Lord's Table until he hath openly declared himself to have truly repented and amended his former naughty life, that the congregation may thereby be satisfied which before were offended; and that he hath recompensed the parties to whom he hath done wrong, or at least declare himself to be in full purpose so to do, as soon as he conveniently may."

But this is not all. The congregation and the clergyman are the judges of flagrant sin; but there



are sins, not public and flagrant, of which the latter is the judge. If he perceives malice and hatred to reign between two persons, he has to take the steps indicated in the case of the open offender, "not suffering them to be partakers of the Lord's Table until he know them to be reconciled." The matter is left entirely in his hands. If one party to the quarrel should repent and forgive, then the clergyman has a right to admit him to the sacrament, while he is directed to repel the obdurate antagonist until he also possesses a spirit of forgiveness. The direction shows that the communicants of the Church of England are not persons whose spiritual and moral life is untested. The clergyman is responsible for them; and it is at his peril if he administers the sacrament to a communicant of whose spiritual condition he is ignorant.

In order that he may have an opportunity of ascertaining the spiritual state of intending communicants, he says in his exhortation: "Because it is requisite that no man should come to the Holy Communion but with a full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned minister of God's Word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of God's Holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness." By these means the Anglican Church is presumed to test its communicants. It aims at gathering around the

Table of the Lord those only whose conscience is quiet, and who fully trust in the mercy of God.

When we turn from the Episcopalians to the Congregationalists, we find that, in the past, there has been no lack of anxiety to test the fitness of those who desire to become Members of the Church. Methods of administration differ in a Church made up of isolated congregations; but, in the main, we presume that Dr. Dale, in his "Manual," gives a sufficient description of what has been the ordinary mode of admitting candidates. "The applicant for membership usually informs the pastor that he wishes to enter the Church, and the pastor has some conversation with him on the reasons for which he wishes it." In his conversation with the pastor "it is enough that the person desiring to enter membership should make it clear that he relies on the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal redemption, and acknowledges the Lord Jesus Christ as the Lord of life and conduct." Dr. Dale continues: "In most Churches the pastor then asks one or two of the church members to see the applicant. It used to be the custom to entrust this duty to deacons only, but of late years it has become common for other members of the Church to be entrusted with it. . . . When the applicant is unknown to the Church, it is the duty of the 'Visitors' to make inquiries as to his character, and to learn whether he is sober, industrious, truthful, honest, a good son, a good father. If the 'Visitors' receive a favourable impression of his religious earnestness, and are satisfied with what they learn about his character, he is 'proposed' by the pastor at the next monthly church meeting, and the 'testimony' of the Visitors is added

to that of the pastor. . . . The practice of generally employing Visitors has many advantages. It relieves the pastor from undue responsibility; it emphasises the fact that the Church, and not merely the pastor, receives the applicant into membership; and it encourages that brotherly frankness in speaking about Christ and the blessedness of the Christian salvation which ought to exist between Christian men.”<sup>1</sup>

Candidates proposed in this manner at one monthly meeting are received into membership at the next, the interval enabling the Church to perfect its inquiries about their character. The name of the new Member is then placed upon the “roll,” and he comes under the action of Church regulations and discipline. Conduct which, in the judgment of the Church, is inconsistent with the profession of fidelity to Christ is followed, according to its gravity, by censure, suspension, or exclusion from membership. “In many Churches it is assumed that if a Member is absent from the Lord’s Supper, with no sufficient reason, more than six months out of twelve, his absence is an evidence either of general religious indifference, or of indifference to communion with the Church to which he belongs; and it is the custom to read off the absentees once a year, after official inquiry into the reasons for absence.”<sup>2</sup>

We think all will admit that the examples which we have adduced show that Anglicans and Congregationalists assent to the principle that the religious character of candidates for membership should be tested, and that a constant oversight should be exercised

<sup>1</sup> *Manual of Congregational Principles*, pp. 166, 167.

<sup>2</sup> *Manual of Congregational Principles*, p. 171.

over Church Members. Methodism has adopted that principle. The difference between the three Churches lies in its application. In their different spheres each is doing its own work. We do not wish to undervalue the disciplinary practice of other Churches; but it is impossible for us to close our eyes to the fact that, in the Class Meeting, Methodism possesses an unparalleled means of spiritual oversight, correction, and discipline. It is an "open secret" that those who watch Methodism from the outside perceive the advantages which the Class Meeting confers upon its native Church. Attempts have been made to transplant it, but it does not flourish in foreign soil. Kindly spectators can only watch it from afar with admiration, and exhort us to defend it against the blight of indifference, and the attacks of inconsiderate pruners who, instead of using a knife to lop off fruitless branches, "lay an axe to the root of the tree."

In comparing the different methods which have been adopted by the Churches for ascertaining the spiritual condition of their Members, there is one peculiarity of the Methodist mode which arrests attention. The closeness and frequency of the inspection are highly characteristic. It was expected that the Methodist should attend his Class "constantly." Wesley's own directions upon this point are unmistakable. Writing an address "to the Societies at Bristol," he says: "If you constantly meet your Band, I make no doubt that you will constantly meet your Class; indeed, otherwise, you are not of our Society. Whoever misses his Class thrice together, thereby excludes himself; and the Preacher that

comes next ought to put out his name. I wish you would consider this; halt not between two. Meet the brethren, or leave them. It is not honest to profess yourself of a Society, and not observe the Rules of it. Be therefore consistent with yourself. Never miss your Class till you miss it for good and all.”<sup>1</sup>

In February 1776, Wesley wrote to Joseph Benson, giving him instructions as to those who neglected to “meet their Classes,” as “meeting in Class” was then styled. He says: “We must threaten no longer, but perform. On November last, I told the London Society, our rule is, to meet a Class once a week; not once in two or three. I now give you warning, I will give tickets to none in February, but those that have done this. I have stood to my word; go you and do likewise, wherever you visit the Classes. Begin, if need be, at Newcastle, and go on at Sunderland. Promises to meet are now out of date. Those that have not met seven times in the quarter, exclude. Read their names in the Society; and inform them all, you will the next quarter exclude all that have not met twelve times; that is, unless they were hindered by distance, sickness, or by some unavoidable business.”<sup>2</sup>

These extracts from Wesley’s letters show that he considered the Rule of the Society required a member to “meet his Class” constantly, that is, every week. When we remember that it is the autocratic law-giver who affirms that such constant attendance is the “rule,” it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the declaration. Wesley’s will was law. It was not

<sup>1</sup> *Methodist Magazine*, 1837, p. 821.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. xii. p. 407.

necessary that his mind should be stated in a Conference, or that his wish should be phrased in a "Minute." His Preachers obeyed his directions implicitly; they made known his determination to the Societies, and whatever he determined concerning the Members became a Methodist "Rule." It will therefore be seen that, in the intention of Wesley, the oversight of the Members of Society by his Class Leaders was to be close and constant; and such close and constant oversight causes his method of supervision to differ very widely from those which have been adopted by other Churches.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MODERN CLASS MEETING.

IT must be remembered that from the earliest days of the Methodist Revival, the Class Meeting has stood in the closest relation with several "prudential helps," which were designed to lead men and women to Christ, and to train them in holiness. One chief original purpose of the Class Meeting was mutual oversight, which, of course, includes spiritual fellowship; that of the associated meetings was, more especially, fellowship. Before the creation of the Class Meeting, while John Wesley was still a member of the Fetter Lane Society, he drew up special rules for the regulation of the Band Societies. Subsequently, the idea of "meeting in band" was continued; and, under varying forms, has been perpetuated amongst the Methodist people. A man "met in band" for the purpose of advancing in the spiritual life. The Class Meeting helped him much, but the Band Meeting more. At the beginning, those who were anxious for closer communion with each other, and for a more searching and complete self-knowledge, were divided by Wesley into little bands or companies; the married or single men, and the married or single women being grouped together. The members of the Bands submitted to the most rigorous

examination of their moral and spiritual character, and strenuously endeavoured to help each other to attain to the most perfect saintliness. It was Wesley's custom to meet together on Wednesday evenings the Bands consisting of men, and the women on Sunday; giving them instruction, and encouraging them in the pursuit of holiness. Once a quarter the men and women met together that they might "eat bread," as did the early Christians, "with gladness and singleness of heart." In the "Bands" the spirit of the great Revival displayed itself in its finest, purest, intensest form; and in the "Love Feasts" it often seemed as if Time had run back and fetched "the age of gold." The glow and glory of the "ancient days" reappeared; "and when they had prayed, the place was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

The process of the years has brought changes which have modified the character of the Class Meeting. Wesley foresaw some of them, and expressed his willingness to accept them if they were improvements. He would have heartily subscribed to Burke's doctrine that "a State without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation. Without such means it might even risk the loss of that part of the constitution which it wished the most religiously to preserve." In building up Methodism, John Wesley wielded the two great forces of conservation and correction; and these forces still continue to mould its constitution and its institutions. The modern Class Meeting evidences the operation of these powers. It conserves its original purposes, but it has been modified to meet urgent and proved necessities.



It must always be remembered that the Class Meeting exists to enable the Ministers of Methodism, through the Leaders, to gain an intimate knowledge of the moral and spiritual condition of the Members of Society. It is absolutely necessary that the Class Meeting should answer this purpose. To this end it is essential that the Leaders should gain an intimate knowledge of persons when they "join" the Class Meeting, while they remain "on trial," and during the continuance of their membership. It is difficult to point out the stage of membership at which the greatest vigilance on the part of a Leader is required. Some would indicate the beginning, and much may be said in favour of that view. There can be no doubt that the "ceased to meet" column in the Methodist Schedules is filled to a considerable extent by those who have never really met in Class. A great Revival occurs in a large town. A number of persons, entirely ignorant of the meaning of Methodist institutions, are awakened, and batches of them are assigned to Leaders, and their names are written in the Class Books. They attend for a while, and then they drop out of sight altogether. But it is hoped that they will return; and inasmuch as they have been, in a sense, "three months on trial," charitable Leaders suggest that Tickets of full Membership may be, not *given to* them, but *left for* them. A sanguine Minister consents; and then, after almost incredible patience, the names are taken off the books, and a large decrease has to be reported.

In the Bristol Society Book for the years 1765-1786, we catch sight of a more excellent way. On the fly-leaf of that book, apparently in Charles

Wesley's handwriting, the following record appears: "It is proposed: 1st. That all persons who shall be admitted into this Society shall have their names entered in this book. 2nd. That no persons shall be admitted without the recommendation of some Member of the Society who is acquainted with their character, having first met in class (at least three times), read over and considered the Rules of the Society. 3rd. That at the expiration of three months, if no objection is made to their character, they shall be received as regular Members of the Society, and their names entered in the Register. As we have often seen the bad consequence of too hastily admitting persons into Society, it is requested of the resident Preacher punctually to observe these Rules. Bristol, September 10th, 1765." That John Wesley approved of this recommendation is clear, for the names of the Members are entered in his handwriting. Columns were ruled for the name, occupation, and residence of the Members, for the Classes in which they meet, and for the names of the persons who have recommended them.

It is impossible to scan these columns without receiving the impression that admission into the Society in the last century was a solemn act, which entailed responsibility not only upon the persons admitted, but also upon those who, in a sense, were sureties for their good behaviour. The practice of sponsorship may be traced beyond the opening of the present century. Persons were recommended to the Leader by Members who knew them. At the Quarterly Visitation of the Class, if the Leader deemed them worthy to be received "on trial," their names were written at

the back of the Class-paper, and, after an interval of three months, the Leader's recommendation was necessary to their reception into full membership.

It would be well if like carefulness marked our present mode of receiving persons into the Classes. Thousands "drift" in and out with the regularity of the flowing and ebbing tide. Every Leader should remember that the Standing Rules which regulate the admission of Members are as follows:—"1. No Preacher shall give Notes (admitting persons on trial) to any but those who are recommended by one he knows, or till they have met three or four times in Class. It is the Leader's duty to give them the 'Rules of the Society' the first time they meet. 2. Neither the Superintendents, nor any other Preachers, shall give Tickets to any till they are recommended by a Leader, with whom they have met, at least two months, on trial. 3. The Leaders' Meeting has a right to declare any person on trial improper to be received into the Society; and after such declaration, the Superintendent shall not admit such person into the Society."

The last regulation intensifies the conviction that the entrance into the Methodist Society is intended to be guarded with scrupulous care. Any Leader who hears that a person whom he believes unfit for membership is "on trial" in another Leader's Class has a right to challenge his reception into Society, and to state the ground of his objection. If the Leaders consider and declare that the objection is valid, then such person cannot receive a Ticket of Membership at that Quarterly Visitation. If this part of the discipline of Methodism could be revived and maintained, the

period of trial for membership would become a reality, and we should be spared a portion of those enormous losses which puzzle friendly onlookers, and greatly distress ourselves.

When a person has been received into membership, the Leader must still addict himself to vigilant inspection. In a small Class consisting, as at the beginning, of a dozen members, it is possible to pay attention to individuals, and to ascertain their spiritual condition with some approach to accuracy. But, unfortunately, the former proportion of Leaders to Members has been destroyed, and now we have to look upon the creation of large Classes which overtax the industry of the most ubiquitous men. It is in these overgrown assemblies that the original idea of the Class Meeting is in danger of being sacrificed. It is fortunate that, as a rule, the men in charge of these congregations of Members have a genius for labour organisation. Feeling that it is impossible to do the whole work themselves, they secure the aid of others, and through their eyes keep weekly watch over the absentees. It is impossible to speak too highly of the wisdom, patience, and courage of the men and women who conscientiously perform the work of guarding the Methodist Societies.

The Members who are present in the Class-room give comparatively little trouble. It is true that it is difficult to follow the variations of the experience of the "silent member," but quiet and private conversation at home puts beyond a doubt the fact that such a person possesses a Christian experience. Moreover, it requires some acuteness to discover the precise spiritual condition of a person whose description of his state is

expressed in ancient platitudes. But the wisdom of the experienced Leader is generally equal to the emergency. He sees that the grave clothes bind a living man, and gradually he loosens them and lets him go.

But the chief difficulties of the Leader lie with those who are rarely if ever seen in the Class-room. The sick and the aged are his peculiar care. He does not number them amongst his anxieties; he looks upon his weekly visits to them as sources of inspiration for work. In addition, there are persons whose lot in life is so peculiar that it is impossible for them to meet in Class with any approach to regularity; in some cases it is impossible for them to meet at all. It is here that the burden of Class-leading presses most heavily on the conscience. The Leader is aware that he is expected to see each person in his Class once a week, and he feels that if his Members do not come to him, he must go to them. It is a toilsome duty; but if it is discharged, the recompense is great. A knowledge of each person whose name is in the Class Book is gained, and the Leader has a sense of confidence when he asks the Minister, at the Quarterly Visitation, to continue the membership of those who have been placed under his care.

The right to recommend the continuance of persons in the Methodist Society carries with it the right to recommend their exclusion. This right must be exercised with a grave sense of responsibility. There are two facts which the Leader must remember. First, while he has the right to recommend the Minister to exclude from membership, he himself has no right to leave off one name from his Class Book. The practice of "dropping" names when the list of

Members is copied at the beginning of a quarter, is absolutely illegal. The name of every person receiving a Ticket, or a Note on Trial, one quarter must be written in the Class Book the next quarter. Then, at the ensuing Visitation, the Minister takes note of any who, in the meantime, have, from any cause, ceased to be Members: whether by death, removal, or forfeiture of membership. And the Minister should write in the Class Book, opposite the name, the reason why such or such an one is no longer accounted a Member.

Secondly, it must be borne in mind that the Methodist Society, following a course of healthy and natural development, has become the Wesleyan Methodist Church. In the earlier days, many Members of the Episcopal and Dissenting Churches were included in the Society. If their names were taken from the "Class-papers," they were not unchurched—their connection with their own Churches continued. But, through the leadings of Providence, that curious condition of ecclesiastical life has ceased. Now, in the words of the Report of the Committee on Church Membership, adopted by the Conference of 1889, "it must not be forgotten that to exclude a person from membership is the most serious and painful exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, to be undertaken only when necessity demands it, and under a sense of solemn responsibility. Indeed, in the independent ecclesiastical position into which Methodism has been led by the providence of God since the death of Wesley, exclusion from membership in the Class Meeting involves, for the time being, excommunication from the visible Church."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, 1889, p. 409.

What reasons, then, justify a Leader in recommending exclusion from Church membership? We cannot return an exhaustive reply; it will be enough if we give a general answer. If a Member does not meet in Class because he has ceased to "desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from his sins," the Leader is compelled to recommend the exclusion of such a person, seeing that he lacks the initial qualification for Church membership. No greater calamity could overtake the Methodist Church than the abandonment of the spiritual test of membership. No consideration should induce us to permit dead trees to disfigure the "garden of the Lord." The conclusion that a man has "lost his religion" must be reached slowly, charitably, and sorrowfully; it must be reached as the final step in a prolonged effort to win him again for Christ; but being reached, the only course open to the Class Leader is to recommend that he be no longer acknowledged as a Member of the Church.

The Leader who wishes to exercise his right of recommendation as a sacred trust will familiarise himself with "the Rules of the Society." That document is still the standard of conduct; its regulations have still to be observed by the Methodist people. Of this every person should be informed when he joins a Class. A copy of the Rules should be handed to him, he should be requested to read it, and he should be especially asked to ponder the closing words, "These are the General Rules of our Societies. . . . If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul, as

they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls."

When persons join a Church, they ought to be made fully acquainted with the conditions upon which they will be permitted to continue in its membership, and "the Rules of the Society" should be familiar as "household words" to every Methodist throughout the country. The Rules are styled "General Rules," and that phrase indicates that certain Regulations exist which apply to particular cases. Those particular Rules have been enacted by the Conference in successive years; and for the direction of the Class Leader, the most important of them have been gathered together, and are now printed in the Appendix to this volume. The "Compendium of Later Regulations" must be closely studied, and its contents must guide the Leader in his inspection of his Class for disciplinary purposes.

When a Member is guilty of conduct which is not formally condemned by the "Rules of the Society," or the further enactments of the Conference, but which is manifestly opposed to the Word of God, the Bible becomes the standard of appeal. By it he must be judged; by it he must be condemned. It is the duty of the Leader, after personal admonition, to acquaint the Minister with the fault of the offending Member; and, if he persists in that fault, to recommend his exclusion.

When a person is excluded from membership, he has a right of appeal to the Leaders' Meeting. If he



should be dissatisfied with the verdict of that Meeting, and with the sentence, he can claim to be tried by a Minor District Meeting, which is composed of four Ministers, two of whom he has a right to nominate, and the Chairman of the District. Should the decision of that Meeting be against him, he can demand a hearing before the Annual District Meeting, when composed of Ministers only; and he has a further right to remove his cause to the Conference, which is the final Court of Appeal. In the overwhelming majority of cases, persons who are excluded from membership by the act of the Minister when meeting the Class do not care to exercise their right of appeal; but should they do so, Methodist law declares that "no person shall be expelled from the Society till his offence has been proved to the satisfaction of a Leaders' Meeting; which Meeting is also entitled to declare by its verdict, whether the facts alleged are, or are not, violations of the laws of God, or of our own Body." It will be seen that the safeguards against hasty and unjust exclusions are numerous; and ordinary experience has proved them to be effective.

There is one subject connected with the supervision of the Classes which calls for special attention. The removal of Members from Class to Class and from Circuit to Circuit results in a great loss from year to year. It is impossible to prevent the whole of that loss, but by careful attention to detail it might be greatly diminished. When a Member leaves one Class for another in the same Society, the transfer should be by mutual agreement between the two Leaders concerned. At any rate, mutual knowledge of the exchange should exist. The same principle

applies when the transfer is from a Class in one Society to a Class of another Society in the same Circuit. Communication should at once take place between the Leaders, and the Member should be seen and welcomed by the person to whose care he is committed.

It is, however, by removals from one Circuit to another that the greatest loss is sustained. In order to prevent the intrusion of unworthy strangers into our Societies, the Conference has enacted that no Member removing from one Circuit to another shall be received into Society "without a Note of Removal signed by one of the itinerant Preachers in the Circuit whence he has come." Without such a Note it is possible for a Member under discipline to relieve himself of the penalty of expulsion by the simple expedient of removal into another—it may be, an adjoining—Circuit. In this way not only is Connexional discipline broken down, but Connexionalism itself ministers to a grave evil in the Christian Church. The "Note of Removal," however, does more than guard against the intrusion of the unworthy. It assists in the godly oversight of those whose spiritual condition fits them for Church membership, and whose spiritual condition is imperilled by their temporary severance from that membership.

When a Member is about to remove to another Circuit, the Leader should ascertain his future residence with the nearest possible approach to accuracy. Then he should ask a Minister for a Note of Removal, giving him the Member's new address. The official Note of Removal consists of two parts. One is handed by the Leader to the Member, to be presented

by him to a Minister in the Circuit to which he is going; the other is sent by the Minister who gives the Note to the Minister in that Circuit, and it contains a request that pastoral care shall be exercised over the removing Member, and that he shall be at once directed to a Class. Particulars as to the status, office, and work of the Member are inserted. On his arrival, he is seen, introduced to a Leader, and congenial work is given him to do. If the Ministers, Leaders, and Members will conscientiously avail themselves of the advantages of the "Note of Removal" system, they will check those grievous losses which are the subject of the annual lamentations of the Methodist Ministers and people.

Methodism, at the present time, suffers from a lack of Class Leaders. As one consequence, there is a tendency to make Ministers the Leaders of the Classes. Indeed, in some places, unless great care is exercised, Lay Leaders will almost disappear. This would be a grievous calamity. It is well known that John Wesley would not permit his Preachers to be Class Leaders.<sup>1</sup> When we consider the brief term of their appointments to their Circuits, their long absence from home when on their "rounds," and the other special conditions of their itinerant life, we can understand the reasonableness of Wesley's prohibition. In the present day these conditions have been modified, and there can be no doubt that a Class conducted by a Minister often answers a very useful purpose. As the Report of the Committee on Church Membership says: "In many places, persons who would, in the first instance, shrink from joining any other Class,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. xiv. p. 373.

would willingly join one of which a Minister is a Leader. By means of such a Class, conducted with tact and judgment, many might be drawn within our closer fellowship, who would otherwise decline to enter it.<sup>1</sup> But while admitting the exceptional value of Ministers' Classes, we strongly deprecate the practice of massing the Members of a Society in such Classes. When we have gained the right standpoint from which to view the work of a Leader, we see that the disappearance of the Lay Leader would defeat one of the chief purposes of the Class Meeting. If that purpose is to be accomplished, if the Class Meeting system of supervision is to be maintained in complete efficiency, there must be an immediate and large increase in the number of Lay Leaders.

In dealing with the modern Class Meeting, it is necessary to recognise the changes which have modified the character of the original institution. Roughly speaking, it may be said that those changes have arisen from the fact that the Class Meeting has gradually absorbed the functions of those "prudential helps" which were associated with it at the beginning of Methodism. It has done more. In some places, it has obscured and almost destroyed the idea that above the Class stands the Society. We admit that other forces have contributed to this result. In many Methodist Chapels, the Prayer Meeting after the Sunday evening service has taken the place of the Society Meeting. The Members of the Classes rarely meet in Church assembly, and the immense advantages of such assembling are lost. But the Class Meeting has been the chief factor in altering

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes*, 1889, p. 409.

the estimate of the Society. Attention has been concentrated on the Class; and Class membership, in the minds of many modern Methodists, has supplanted the idea of Society membership. It is essential that the mistaken notion, that a part is greater than the whole, should be corrected. Society Meetings should be at once re-established wherever they have been neglected; and they should be regularly held in order that they may regain their pre-eminence, and continue that career of usefulness which was so marked at the outset, and through the Middle Age of Methodism.

It is, however, when we turn towards the Band Meetings that we are impressed with the absorbing power of the Class Meeting. In a letter to John Cricket, written in 1783, Wesley says: "You must immediately resume the form at least of a Methodist Society. . . . Try if you cannot persuade three men, if no more, and three women to meet in Band."<sup>1</sup> This part of the "form" of the Methodist Society has passed through important changes. At first the "Bands" were the most private of all the Methodist Meetings. Words spoken therein were uttered in the fullest confidence that they would never be repeated outside the room. That confidence has added a phrase to the Methodist vernacular. "In band" is the equivalent of inviolable secrecy. Gradually, however, the Band Meetings became the scene not so much of heart-searching as of witness-bearing; and a desire sprang up to bear that witness in a more public manner.

In 1806, the Conference attempted to check this tendency. It was reported that some of the Preachers

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. xiv. p. 373.

had neglected to enforce Band Meetings, and that what were called Fellowship Meetings had been set up in their place; and the Conference resolved, "We require all our Superintendents to restore the proper Methodist Meetings wherever they have been superseded or neglected."<sup>1</sup>

In 1812, the question was asked, "What can be done to revive and extend Band Meetings?" "1. Let every Superintendent address to the Believers under his care, met in their respective Societies, a strong and appropriate exhortation on the excellency of Band Meetings. 2. Let him meet all the Leaders of the Societies, and form out of their Classes as many Bands as possible, from those Believers who do not at present meet in Band, and who are willing so to do. 3. The weekly meetings, commonly called the meetings of the Public Bands, shall be established and attentively preserved, wherever the number of those who meet in Band will admit of it."<sup>2</sup> These meetings of the Public Bands were formed of the Members of the Private Bands; and the "b" on the Society Ticket was the sign admitting to the assembly.

Steadily, however, the meeting of the Public Bands advanced towards the position of a "Fellowship Meeting." Ceasing to be an aggregate gathering of those who met in Private Band, the ordinary Members of the Society were admitted, and at last the guards which conserved its original purpose were removed. The "Public Bands" indicated that yearning for *fellowship* which characterised, and which still

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. ii. p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. iii. p. 292.

distinguishes, the true Methodist. As the original Band Meetings, to the great loss of the Church, were gradually discontinued in many places, the passion for fellowship found its sphere more and more in the Class. Indeed, that true idea that the Class Meeting is a "Fellowship Meeting" has overshadowed and in some places completely obscured that idea of mutual oversight which, from the first, has been a chief part of its purpose. We must now recognise the change in the Class Meeting which has resulted from the special prominence which the idea of "fellowship" has assumed.

From the beginning, the Class Meeting has ministered to that need of fellowship which is a sign of the spiritual life. We have shown that in the earliest times, when the Leader had conscientiously discharged the duty of ascertaining the Christian experience of his Members, the Class became the scene of prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving. This must have been a delightful part of the proceedings. In those days of persecution, the Class-room was a haven of refuge to many a storm-beaten Methodist. Isolated at home, shunned abroad, almost universally misunderstood and execrated, there was one place in which he was warmly welcomed, in which he could tell the story of the trials through which he was passing, in which he could frankly express the deepest thoughts of his heart. In the world, the Word of the Lord was often like "a burning fire shut up in his bones;" in the Class, it glowed in his speech. Expression gave relief, it intensified conviction, it excited sympathy, it toned the spirit to more resolute daring in the cause of Christ.

The days of open persecution have passed, but the

need of the comfort of fellowship continues. The way of the Christian through this world is still rough. It is true that if a man hides his religion lest its light should pain weak eyes, if he considers that the chief duty of a child of God is to conceal the evidences of his sonship, if he exhausts his ingenuity in attempts to conform to the world, he may saunter in some "by-path meadow" where the sward is soft to the foot. But such a man is an unworthy successor of the early Methodists. Until the will of God is done on earth, as it is in heaven, the Christian must make his way to the skies through hosts of difficulties. He who fights the battles of the Lord never lacks antagonists. Often the strain and weariness are so great that John Nelson's words rise to the lips: "I am more than ever convinced that my chief work in this world is to get well out of it." The rest and refreshment which arise from "fellowship" are still indispensable to the pilgrim-soldiers of Christ.

Christian fellowship has its origin in a common experience. The converts of Pentecost were made one by their sorrow for sin, by their faith in Christ, by the change which was wrought in them through the power of the Holy Ghost. This is still the secret of the union of the children of God. It must be remembered that the Class Meeting can never answer its purpose of fellowship if the need of conversion is overlooked. Ampler knowledge has led to the modification of the theory that each Christian passes through precisely similar experiences at the beginning of his spiritual life. Here, as elsewhere, "there are diversities of operations, but the same Spirit." But whether the dawn comes with accurate observation,



or almost imperceptibly, it must come, it must broaden into day, if there is to be any true communion of heart amongst the Members of our Class Meetings. St. John saith, "If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." That is the canon, and against it there is no appeal.

There is a danger lest, in our anxiety to "bulk large" amongst the Churches, we should hastily sweep into our Societies well-intentioned people, who were never converted, and who know nothing of Christian experience. By this course, not only do we indefinitely multiply the number of "silent Members," but we make fellowship impossible. It is no wonder that, when a Class is largely made up of such persons, the Leader has to stretch his mind upon the rack in order to entertain them by straining after exciting novelties. Oversight and fellowship are sacrificed; and the Class, descending from its unparalleled position, falls to the level of a Mutual Improvement Society. The warning uttered by Dr. Dale, in his noble Centenary sermon in City Road Chapel, was most timely. That sentence in which he asserted that "Methodism has its roots in a living faith in Christ, as a real and objective atonement for the sin of the world," deserves to be written in letters of gold. His clarion cry, "Surrender that faith, and the roots of your life are destroyed!" should ring throughout our Church. Not less heed should we pay to his warning that the neglect of the doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit will ruin our Class Meetings. That assertion is incontrovertible. When assurance becomes timid and well-nigh hopeless surmise, then the voice of clear and joyous testimony

will cease to be heard in our Class-rooms, and the beautiful fellowship that has hitherto distinguished the Methodists will cease.

The fellowship of the Methodist people is in every way remarkable. It makes those who witness it think of the days when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." Methodism has revived the traditions and reproduced the experience of those "golden days" of Christianity. Outsiders style our perfect sympathy with each other "freemasonry." They are amazed at the way in which two Methodists, who have never met before, understand each other at once, and plunge into pleasant and hearty conversation. This spirit is fostered by the Itinerancy, and by the literature of Methodism; but the place of its origin is the Class Meeting. It springs from a mutual experience. Brothers are brothers everywhere. If this manifestation of Christian fellowship is to be conserved, then we must strive with all our might to prevent the Class Meeting from being perverted from its original purpose.

One aspect of the modern Class Meeting remains to be indicated. It is not only the scene of oversight and fellowship, it is also the place of instruction. The modern Methodist is not content to learn solely from the "experience" of his fellow Members, and the "ghostly counsels" of his Leader. He craves instruction in Biblical truth, and especially in the more advanced doctrines of the Christian religion. The Itinerancy, and the prevailing evangelism of ordinary Methodist preaching militate against consecutive teaching from the pulpit, and our Members desire that what is lacking in the sanctuary should

be supplied in the Class-room. In the early days of Methodism some favoured Societies had the privilege of listening to men who continuously led them into the mysteries of the Wisdom of God. Charles Wesley resided in Bristol for twenty-two years, and was accustomed, in the course of his preaching to the Society there, to expound consecutively whole Books of Scripture. It is no wonder that he left his mark upon the Methodism of the Western City.

The thirst for Bible knowledge is not only a healthy sign of the times, it is a recurrence of a sign of the former days. The Members of the Holy Club at Oxford were nicknamed "Bible moths." It was while John Wesley was listening to the reading of Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans in the Aldersgate Street Room that he felt his heart "strangely warmed." Throughout his career he was "a man of one Book." To angry controversialists, who confronted him with canons and councils and the sayings of the Fathers, Wesley answered, "Here I stand with my Bible!" With such an example, it would be amazing if the Methodists were content with a superficial knowledge of the Scriptures. Yielding to a laudable desire, the proceedings of the Class Meeting in many places now include Bible Readings, care being taken to select topics which are related to Christian experience, and which are likely to promote spiritual conversation among the Members. The modern Class Meeting thus answers three purposes. It enables the Leader to ascertain the religious condition of his Members; it grants an opportunity of Christian fellowship; and it assists in the instruction of the Church in the "deep things of God."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MODERN CLASS LEADER.

THE task of sketching the modern Class Leader is lightened by the fact that we have already described the men who, at the outset of the Evangelical Revival, were selected by Wesley and his " Assistants " to watch and guard the Members of the Methodist Societies. Modern Leaders are their direct successors. Their work is essentially the same, and " to serve the present age," Class Leaders require similar qualifications. Availing ourselves of the outlines already traced, we will re-touch them here and there ; and try to make our picture complete by suggesting the atmosphere and scenery of the present day. For it must be remembered that the modern Leader finds his sphere at the close of the nineteenth, and not in the middle of the eighteenth century. While he ought to be all that the early Leader was, his leadership is conditioned by the fact that it has to be exercised amidst different surroundings. In innumerable instances the old ends are reached by the old ways ; but frequently those ends have also to be attained by the use of means which are adapted to the special needs of the present time.

Without attempting any comparison between the Leaders of the past and the present, and without stay-

ing to point out wherein they differ, we will now indicate and emphasize some of the conditions of a Class Leader's success. The Leader who is anxious to succeed should understand what he means to accomplish. The "open secret" of success in every department of human enterprise is to know what to do, and to do it. We have shown that the pre-eminent object of the Class Meeting is to maintain and mature the spiritual life of its Members. All other ends are subsidiary. If the spiritual life of a Class is low, success and prosperity in other directions are merely modifications of failure. It is well that the Leader, like the Apostle, can say, "This one thing I do." Aiming at "one thing" concentrates purpose; it prevents the instability that results from having "a mind and a mind;" it gathers up the whole force of a man's character, and sends it in one direction. The advantage inseparable from a clear view of the end to be reached is possessed by the Methodist Class Leader.

Clearly as the end of the Class Meeting may be discerned, the conscientious Leader is often in doubt as to the best means of nourishing the spiritual life of his Members. Let him, first of all, settle this with himself: the greatest spiritual force in a Class is the spirituality of the Leader. The Lord Jesus Christ has revealed a law which acts not only in the intellectual and moral, but also in the spiritual world. He told those who had selected the Scribes and Pharisees for their teachers, that, when they were "perfected," they would only reach the level of their masters. What that level was, He indicated when He pictured the blind leading the blind, and both falling into the ditch.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke vi. 39, 40.

He counselled them to choose a "Master" who stood in the light, far above themselves. Then they would always be climbing upward, always rising towards the day. When they had learned their Teacher's lore, being "perfected," they would not be blind men stumbling into gulfs of gloom; they would be like their Master, and they would see Him as He is.

The lesson taught by Jesus Christ should be burnt into the memory and conscience of every one who leads a Methodist Class. If the Members of the Society are to emerge into clear light, their Leaders must dwell "in an ampler purer air," high on the mountain where stands the Great Teacher. The Leader who is content with a low place in the Kingdom of God does not decide his own position solely; he fixes the standing of every man who chooses him as an example of Christianity. It is useless to discuss methods of "leading" a Class if the man who "leads" *does not move*; if he does not "continually ascend" towards those heights upon which He walks Who is the brightness of the Father's glory. By a subtle law of communication, the Members of a Class catch and express the tone of their Leader's religious character. If that tone is one of high, intense, clear spirituality, then varying methods of meeting a Class will have one invariable result. The ruling passion for spiritual fellowship will win its victory, and every conversation will end in the summons, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul!"

The lot of the modern Leader is cast at the close of the nineteenth century. That is a significant fact. In some secluded villages and hamlets, the peacefulness

of the eighteenth century still broods. But such peacefulness is passing away. The political, commercial, and social restlessness of the towns is invading the obscurest parts of the country. Everywhere it is becoming more and more difficult to gather "the harvest of a quiet eye," to possess the soul in peace, to cultivate deep spirituality, to screen the flame of zeal from the gusts of a stormy world. Those who are acquainted with the circumstances of the modern Leader know that, in many cases, he is hurried and hunted by work, and that he can find scant opportunity for the steady cultivation of "pure and undefiled religion." But it is the way and wont of the spiritual life to assert its mastery over circumstances. Instead, therefore, of lingering upon the difficulties which confront the Leader, we will proceed to show how some of them may be overcome.

He whose calling it is to examine others should inspect himself. Leisure for self-examination is not abundant, but by ingenious methods a little must be found. Some of us, in the midst of a busy life, look back with pleasure toned by sadness upon the time when we could obey George Herbert's counsel:—

"By all means use some time to be alone.

Salute thyself: see what thy soul doth wear.

Dare to look in thy chest, for 'tis thine own:

And tumble up and down what thou find'st there."

Now, self-salutations are hindered by the eager voices that demand our attention to the manifold details of business. Still, we know Leaders who are "men of affairs," some of whom might be taken as incarnations of the spirit of briskness, who, by the exercise of a benevolent tyranny over themselves and

others, do contrive to secure quiet moments for self-examination. Before they meet their Class, and amidst the roaring of the tramp and traffic of a great city, their Office becomes a sacred place. They retire into the temple of their spirit; and there, with deep humility, they review the experience of the week, confess its failures, and bow with thankfulness before a pardoning God. They "stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord;" and, having seen it, they possess the power to show it to others.

A Leader's time for seeing himself may be limited, but he is bound to secure adequate opportunities for beholding Christ. The constant contemplation of Christ produces an ever-increasing spirituality. It is not enough to come to Him for pardon. Like the first two disciples, we must ask, "Master, where dwellest Thou?" Unto us, as unto them, He will say, "Come and see;" and where He dwells, there must we abide.<sup>1</sup> Our peace, our comfort, our life depend upon a perpetual vision of the Son of God. In spite of the difficulties that beset and becloud us, we must find and follow our Lord. Let each Leader weigh these words, and test them to the uttermost: "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."<sup>2</sup> The experience of many of the most harassed, the most business-driven Christian men has explained and confirmed this assurance. Following Christ, the Shekinah has shone before their eyes; following Christ, the wilderness night has only changed the pillar of cloud to the pillar of fire. By pursuing the ever-brightening light, they have been led into an ever-deepening life.

The companionship of Christ is the secret of

<sup>1</sup> St. John i. 37-39.

<sup>2</sup> St. John viii. 12.



spiritual understanding, healthiness, and power. A man who has to deal with religious experience in its ever-shifting phases is often perplexed. He has to "justify the ways of God to men." Mysterious dealings of Providence have to be explained; seemingly harsh decisions of the Divine will have to be harmonised with the Divine mercifulness; obscure doctrines have to be illumined; the strangeness that intensifies the smart of "fiery trial" has to be removed; the shock of sudden bereavement has to be softened. "Who is sufficient for these things?" He only can be "a helper of many," whose daily fellowship with the "Man of Sorrows" has made him "acquainted with grief." That fellowship gives an insight into the mind of God. The Saviour marked a distinct stage in the education of the Apostles when He said unto them, "No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends."<sup>1</sup> He explained the reason for this change of name. Up to that time they had obeyed Him, because they had accepted Him as their Master. They had served Him with the blind obedience of "bond servants." Without understanding the reason or perceiving the reasonableness of His orders, they had tried to execute them. But now they were to be called into the inner circle of His thought, that they might discern His motives and see the reason for His commands. Resting there, they would understand Him. They would do His will with their eyes open. He would make known to them all things that He had heard from His Father. Abiding in the centre of light, they would be able to

<sup>1</sup> St. John xv. 15.

follow the rays that streamed from that point over the whole expanse of human thought and experience.

Surely a Leader should "covet earnestly" such a position. If a Leader is a "servant" only, he will often stand helpless in the presence of the insoluble problems that confront him. He will murmur the commonplaces with which unskilled and inapt well-meaning people seek to comfort those who mourn. Troubles which are so superficial that they may be cured by prosaic platitudes may be successfully treated by one who "is unskilful in the word of righteousness;" but in a thousand instances he will fail. Let a man so dwell with Christ in loving companionship as to see into His mind, then in it he will find written clearly the will of God. It is only the comrades of Christ who understand the meaning of that saying of His which finds no record in any Gospel. In some moment of profound communion, the Lord Jesus placed upon the lips of St. John a message to be delivered to His "friends" in all ages of the Church: "This is the message which we have heard from Him, and announce unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Only those who understand Christ, can receive these words. Jesus Christ is the answer to every question that a reverent mind can ask concerning God and man. Did not Jesus say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father?" Those who have so learned of Him as to know Him possess the power to lift the burden and lighten the mystery of "this strange" and otherwise "most unintelligible world." Such men are able to render Divine reasons for Divine actions, not human guesses which increase the blackness of gloom.

When Jesus Christ calls us into His companionship, He does more than admit us to an understanding of the Divine will. He unveils His presence, and takes our heart with His spotless beauty. That vision of Divine-human perfection casts us down that it may lift us up. In its radiance we discern our own defects. We see that we are unfit for fellowship with the King of Kings. We learn that we cannot walk together unless we are agreed. We must be like Him, not in opinions only, but in tone, in taste, in disposition, in intention, in character, in spirit; throughout the whole realm of our being we must resemble Him. The man who sees Jesus as He is needs no other incentive to holiness. The vision makes him "hunger and thirst after righteousness." He can lift no excuse for sin into the pure light that falls from the face of Jesus. He can discuss no plea for self-seeking at the foot of the Cross. He can suffer no besetment to "come unto him delicately," and plead in broken whisper—"Surely the bitterness of death is past!" The glory of Christ consumes the love of sin; and those who walk in that great light are delivered from spiritual weakness, and are filled with "the healthful spirit of His grace."

Insight into God's will, and holiness, or healthiness of soul are not the only benefits that come to those who abide with Christ. Enthusiasm for work is kindled in His Presence. The Christian life is becoming, in an ever-increasing degree, the personal service of a personal Saviour. But how are we to serve Him if we do not see Him? A sad spectacle of the religious life is that of a man who serves Christ only from "a sense of duty." The Leader,

who goes to the Class-room because he is unwilling to abandon his work lest "the Lord should have a controversy with him," may perform his task with some easing of his own conscience. But what of his influence over others? A "sense of duty" is well, and we would that many had it who now have it not. "A sense of duty" is much to be preferred to no sense at all of what is owing to our Lord. But a vision of Christ is far better! We linger sometimes when conscience says "You ought;" we fly when, in closest fellowship, our Master whispers, "I have called you friends; ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you."

In spiritual work, true enthusiasm is power; and power is what every Leader needs. At the first, an "enthusiast" was a person who seemed to be possessed by a Divine spirit; he was a man who was filled with God. Such a man was carried out of himself by an ecstasy of mind which appeared to be a supernatural gift. If we read a Christian meaning into the word, then enthusiasm is the secret of success in Church work. How is it to be obtained? How are we to be emptied of self, and filled with God? Jesus Christ has given the answer. "Jude saith unto Him, Lord, what is come to pass that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered, If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."<sup>1</sup> The world has its eyes fixed upon itself; its obedience is rendered to self; its love is self-centred. It has no time to look out and *abroad* in search of God. The Father does

<sup>1</sup> St. John xiv. 22, 23.

not thrust Himself upon those who do not wish to retain Him in their thoughts; and therefore for the world there is no manifestation of His Presence. But those who are tired of self, who find Christ in their weariness and cling to Him, whose hearts are conquered by His pardoning mercy, they look for the Lord "more than watchmen look for the morning." They wait for Him in patient obedience; they welcome Him with ardent affection. The power of love for God gradually masters self. And when self is mastered and cast out, the King comes in. How are we to love God with a fervour that shall allure Him to our hearts as to a resting-place in a hostile world? "If any man love Me." Such is the royal road which leads to the possession of God. Loving Christ more and more until we love Him with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength,—that is the way to be filled with God. When that result is attained, then only are we true Christian enthusiasts; then only do we perform our work as good and faithful servants, who enter even now "into the joy of their Lord."

To the Leader seeking after fitness for his position we have given this first counsel—"Be much alone with the Lord Jesus." Now we go a step further, and say, "Be much alone with His Word." We have emphasized the fact that from its beginning Methodism has been closely associated with Bible study. Wesley, although an incessant reader in many departments of literature, gloried in the fact that he was "a man of one Book." At this moment, a scene in his life comes before us. In 1747, he determined to publish several of his sermons, in order that the world might know what he taught "as the essentials of true religion."

Withdrawing from the distractions of the town, he sought a retreat in the rural quietness of Lewisham, and then gave himself up to the searching of the Scriptures. By the light of his own words, we can see him in his seclusion. He says: "Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights: 'Lord, is it not Thy Word, If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God?' Thou 'givest liberally, and upbraidest not.' Thou hast said, 'If any be willing to do Thy will, he shall know.' I am willing to do, let me know Thy will. I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, 'comparing spiritual things with spiritual.' I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach."<sup>1</sup>

This picture will doubtless excite the envy of many Leaders who are forced to pursue their Bible studies in the midst of turmoil and interruption. But, although it is impossible to command the tranquillity in which Wesley must have revelled, the lessons taught by this scene are "not for an age, but for all time." The Leader's success will depend upon his becoming a master of the Scriptures. He ought to store his mind with passages from the Bible for his own edification,

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. v. Pref. iii.

instruction, and comfort. The reception of the Word is closely connected with the beginning, continuance, and perfecting of the spiritual life. We are begotten by the Word, and we are sanctified by the Truth of God.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to sustain ourselves in vigorous Christian life if we deny to our spirit that "bread of the mighty" which God has provided for us in His own Word.

But Bible study implies more than storing the memory with texts. The Scriptures are called "living oracles." They are not dead words. They live, and they display all the signs of life. They grow like a tree, they spread out their branches, they put forth leaves, they blossom, they bear abundant fruit. The man who is to instruct others must see that his Bible is to himself a living book. It lives now. It is not a withered palm-tree that stands in the dusty deserts of the past; it is a tree of life that "yieldeth her fruit every month, and the leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations." It is essential that the Leader should recognise this quality of the Book. The Truth in seedlings of phrases, or saplings of verses, lives and grows if properly planted in congenial hearts. The search for Truth must never be remitted; and the difficult art of planting it in the mind must be practised and perfected.

Wesley, in order that he might arrive at "essential truth," was not content to read, and search, and compare. He consulted those who were experienced in the things of God; and then "the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak." The Class Leader has special opportunities for availing himself of the know-

<sup>1</sup> St. James i. 18; St. John xvii. 17.

ledge that comes through the experience of others, and we need not dwell upon that point. It is necessary, however, to insist upon the advisability of constantly consulting the books which explain the Bible, and those which illustrate the varying experiences of the religious life. In the Appendix, we have given a list of some of the works which, if read by Class Leaders, will result in profit to themselves and their Members. Reliable Commentaries and high-toned Biographies are invaluable; they illuminate the mind, and they stir the heart. A Leader cannot know his Bible too exhaustively; he cannot be too well acquainted with the facts of Christian experience in all ages.

It is imperative that the Class Leader should find time for quiet communion with God. No demands, no pleadings of the world should cause him to sacrifice the "hour of prayer." Hurried devotions mean superficial religion, and transient influence. The Leader ought to study the law of "the storage of force" in the spiritual life. If he is to make an impression upon those who surround him in the Class-room he must steal away from business, and win a few moments in which he may quiet his mind. Then, when the vexing voices of the world are hushed, and there is stillness in the soul, he can kneel down at the altar which is sacred with the light of memory, and the glory of the Lord. It is well sometimes to kneel there without uttering a word; just waiting until the spirit becomes conscious of God. When the Divine light fills the mind, and the Divine fire glows in the heart, the lips may speak. Petitions for self, requests for others, and, especially, entreaties for the coming of the Kingdom of God release the mind from



the bondage of the world: they cause it to "seek those things which are above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God." If we stand at that right hand even for a moment, we are clothed with power. We receive the touch that fits us for service. We go to our work in the sustaining power and prevailing might of the Holy Ghost.

If a Class Leader possesses natural and spiritual fitness for his office, he is a man to be envied. When we see such a Leader, "full of faith and power," sitting in the midst of his Members, we are irresistibly reminded of the character and work of one of the most distinguished men in the Apostolic age. Joseph, of Cyprus, was "a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith." In his work he displayed special qualities, and because of those qualities he "was by the Apostles surnamed Barnabas, which is, being interpreted, Son of Consolation."<sup>1</sup> What was the meaning of his new name? It signified that, in a pre-eminent degree, Barnabas was an agent through whom the Holy Spirit carried on the work which Jesus Christ predicted that the Comforter should accomplish. The Holy Spirit was to "guide into all the truth;" He was to console the orphaned Church; He was to convict "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment;" He was to take the things of Christ, and to declare them to the disciples.<sup>2</sup> Now, the title of Barnabas shows that he was distinguished by his power of counselling, of comforting, of admonishing, and of applying Divine truth to the spiritual necessities of men. Is not that a prophetic sketch of the Class Leader's work?

<sup>1</sup> Acts iv. 36, xi. 24.

<sup>2</sup> St. John xvi. 8-14.

One scene in the life of Barnabas casts a clear light on his character and work. Being sent by the Church at Jerusalem to inspect the Greeks who had been gathered in as a result of the preaching of certain itinerant men of Cyprus and Cyrene who had been "scattered abroad upon the persecution, which arose about Stephen," he journeyed to Antioch. When he saw "the grace of God," that was enough! He was a broad-hearted man, and the spectacle of men and women rejoicing in the mercy of the Lord made him "glad." Our heart cleaves to him all the more because of this capacity for gladness. The man who cannot smile lacks one qualification for successful leadership. But he not only rejoiced. He knew that the lovely morning of early Christian experience is sometimes darkened, that in some cases the sun goes down at noon. And so he assembled the converts, and exhorted them all—exhorted them one by one—"that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." And the result of his work was that "much people was added to the Lord." He did more. He went to Tarsus, and brought from thence Saul. "And it came to pass that even for a whole year they were gathered together with the Church, and taught much people." The inspection, exhortation, instruction, and fellowship were constant, and the Church flourished under the genial oversight of "the Son of Consolation."

"Much people was added unto the Lord." That is the object which those who possess the spirit of Barnabas aim at and achieve. It is the chief work of the Methodist Class Leader. If those whom he leads first close with Christ, and then "cleave unto

the Lord," his methods of meeting his Class may be left, to a great extent, to his own discretion. Generally speaking, the old plan of examining the Members "one by one" will be found the most effective. It enables the Leader to ascertain, with near approach to accuracy, the spiritual condition of those for whom he is responsible, and it assists him to give to each timely admonition and suitable advice and consolation. It also trains the Members to tell their experience. To speak in Class is often the first step that a man takes towards the work of an Exhorter, a Local Preacher, or a Minister. There can be no doubt that the opinion expressed in the Report of the Committee on Church Membership is correct. "But for the practice of simple and fervent utterance in the Class Meeting, it is very doubtful whether such a harvest of Christian workers as has been reaped year by year could ever have been grown or gathered amongst us. In the Class Meeting the finest evangelical instruments have been shaped and tempered."<sup>1</sup> The witness-bearing of the Class-room is essential to Methodism.

It must, however, be understood that the mode of individual questioning and response is not the only way in which Classes may be met. The Conference of 1878, when speaking to the Leaders in its "Annual Address," said: "You have it in your power to diversify the methods of holding the Meetings according to your preferences, always keeping in mind that the aim of the Class Meeting is the mutual edification of its Members. We would especially recommend a much freer use of Holy

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes*, 1889, p. 406.

Scripture, the mould into which the religious life should be cast.”<sup>1</sup> The Leader, however, must note the later counsel: “But strict care should be taken that the Meeting shall not become merely a Bible Class. The proper business of the Class Meeting, it must never be forgotten, is spiritual fellowship.”<sup>2</sup> The Conference of 1889, in adopting the Report of the Committee on Church Membership, again expressed itself in favour of the use of diversified methods.

There can be no doubt that the ancient mode of meeting a Class has sometimes failed to secure the best results, and has borne hardly upon persons who required other treatment. “Experiences” have, in too many cases, become stereotyped. Every Leader knows this difficulty, and has felt his ingenuity sorely taxed to say something fresh each week to Members in whose statements there was nothing new. Then it is indisputable that, while many persons revel in the recital of their religious experience, some shrink from such revelations. This is especially the case with “devout women not a few.” The Leader has, therefore, to adapt methods to circumstances. Understanding clearly the purpose which the Class Meeting must serve, he will reach his end by his own ways. He must know the spiritual condition of each of his Members, and he must make the Class minister to the nourishment of their spiritual life. If they are “alive to God,” and constantly “going on to perfection,” he may be sure that his methods are well chosen, and that they meet with the approval of the Divine Spirit.

A Leader will occasionally find it useful to suspend

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes*, 1878, p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes*, 1889, p. 411.

the practice of questioning his Members, and allow them to speak or to remain silent as they choose. When skilfully guided, an hour's general conversation in the Class-room is highly interesting; and it has sometimes been found that "silent members" have been allured out of their reticence, and have joined in pleasant talk about the things of God.

In some Classes, a quarterly programme of subjects for conversation is prepared; and if this involves Bible-searching at home, it answers a valuable purpose. The introduction of the Bible Reading into the Class marks a distinct advance. The Leaders who adopt this method of varying the proceedings of the Class Meeting find that it imposes a heavy burden upon them. The "Reading" must be carefully prepared, and its preparation involves the close study of the Scriptures, and also of those books which explain the meaning of the selected verse or paragraph. In this age of keen inquiry, the Leader who makes a monthly Bible Reading a part of his programme should aim at possessing at least a thorough knowledge and understanding of the New Testament. He should study the various Books separately, taking a Gospel or an Epistle; and, in successive "Readings," expound it in order to his Members. The numerous admirable Commentaries and Expositions which are now available greatly assist any one who adopts this mode of feeding the flock of God. It must, however, always be remembered that the Bible Reading is only an auxiliary method, and that it has to be used in connection with those means by which the Leader ascertains and improves the condition of the spiritual life of the Members of his Class.

The monthly Prayer Meeting in the Class is invaluable. Timid Members, who dare not pray in public, are able to utter a few sentences in the comparative privacy of the Class-room, and even the usually "silent member" can whisper "Amen." The supplications of those who are more accustomed to plead with God are refreshing to the Leader, and most helpful to his work. The anxieties of the Class Leader are heavy. Sometimes it seems as if he alone was anxious for the prosperity of his Members. "All seek their own," he mourns; "I have no man like-minded, who will care genuinely for their state." The Prayer Meeting reveals his error. It shows that there are others who are sharing his burden, and who are set upon the coming of the Kingdom of Christ. When the Members pray for each other, the sympathy which prompts and finds expression in the prayer is the bond of fellowship. Those who plead for each other in the presence of their Father demonstrate the fact and exercise the privilege of brotherhood. By mutual prayer and supplication "their hearts are comforted, being knit together in love."

The monthly Prayer Meeting in the Class-room touches the Sunday evening Prayer Meeting in the chapel. Where Leaders maintain and make much of the monthly Prayer Meeting, where "the spirit of supplication" is allowed and encouraged to grow into the gift of prayer, it is in such Societies that the Preacher finds most help in the Public Prayer Meeting after the Sunday evening service.

But prayer does more. We are beginning to study the profound meaning of those statements concerning prayer which appear in the conversation of Christ

with His disciples in the "upper room." Those statements are startling. They assure us that petitions in the Name of Jesus for spiritual blessings are omnipotent. Unbelief reads its own doubts into them, and explains away the plenitude of promise. But the devout Christian watches them, desires to understand them, longs to test them, and yearns to prove their truth. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask any thing of the Father, He will give it you in My Name."<sup>1</sup> That must be true! When we have learned to ask and to receive in the Name of Jesus Christ, all things are ours. In some Class Meetings, in which the spiritual tone is exceptionally high, the secret of Christ's assurance has been discovered. Who can estimate the effect upon the Church of the prayers which are continuously offered by the Members? There are some chapels in which the cloud of the Divine glory seems to abide. Strangers who enter them become conscious of an influence which compels them to say, "This is the gate of heaven!" What is the secret? In some cases, the Saturday evening Prayer Meeting; in others, the Sunday Morning Class; in all, the ardent pleadings of the Members of the Church for the manifestation of the glory of the Lord. The success of Methodism as a spiritual force depends upon the prayers of the children of God. The Leader who trains the Members of his Class to pray, not only unites them in sympathy, but brings the light of God's salvation into the experience of the Church and the world.

The Class Leader will do well to train his Members to a regular attendance at the Lord's Supper. Twice

<sup>1</sup> St. John xvi. 23.

a year at least "this Holy Sacrament" might furnish a profitable subject for conversation and inquiry. And as "any time" is apt to become the equivalent of "no time," we would suggest two appropriate seasons; in December—in view of the annual Communion and Covenant Service, and "in the midst of the years." In the week following the June administration of the Lord's Supper, might it not be well to ask the Members, one by one, if, on the previous Sabbath, they had a "season of refreshing" at the Table of the Lord? If not, Why not? The Leader might meet questions half way, encourage statement of scruples, educate conscience, make clear the scriptural obligation, and, "in words that burn," set forth the blessedness of "showing the Lord's death till He come." And, at some suitable time in December, he might urge a conscientious attendance at the approaching Covenant Service. "Take with you words"—the order and form of the Service; read selected portions; show the agreement between the terms of the Covenant Service and the hymns which we are wont to sing the year round, especially those "For Believers Saved;" make it clear that, in the Covenant Service, we do not commit ourselves to a consecration more entire than that which the New Testament demands. In this way, let the Class Meeting be a Preparation Class for the "holy convocation" on New Year's Sabbath. Not only will the introduction of this subject into the Class Meeting be welcome and instructive, but honour will be rendered to the great "Covenanting Ordinance;" and in all her borders Methodism will be strengthened.

There is one other method of increasing the interest



and efficiency of the Class Meeting, which may be briefly noted. Every Leader should take care that, as far as possible, each Member is engaged in some form of Christian work. They should be encouraged occasionally to describe that work in the Class Meeting. Such recitals divert the mind from the contemplation of self. Sometimes the most spiritual men and women feel that they have little experience to communicate. If an opportunity is given them to tell of the progress of their work, they will introduce an element of brightness into the Class which will inspire those who listen.

There are a few important details connected with the meeting of a Class, which we will only mention. The Leader should be punctual in beginning and ending the Class, he himself being first in the room. He should select beforehand suitable hymns, and see that they are sung to lively tunes. He should conduct the proceedings with vivacity and fervour. He should set an example of brief, bright, and bracing talk. He should accurately mark his Class Book; in the Classroom he should call over every name, particularly ascertaining and noting in each case the reason of absence. He should, as a general rule, receive the contributions of the Members weekly, putting down first his own.

Two matters should especially occupy the attention of the Leader outside the Class. He should strive with all his might to retain the Members who are on his Class Book; and he should ever be on the watch to secure new Members. The Leaders who remain to the Sunday evening Prayer Meeting have an opportunity for recruiting their ranks. If they speak to the strangers

who seem interested in the service, they will often discover Methodists from other Circuits, who only need a welcome to induce them to resume their attendance at Class. Then in the Prayer Meeting many persons are to be found who have been impressed by the sermon, and who can be won by a word. Every Leader should, when practicable, attend the Prayer Meetings, Band Meetings, Love Feasts, Society Meetings, and the administration of the Lord's Supper. He should attend for his own edification, as an example to his Members, and also for the purpose of gathering new Members who otherwise may be lost to the Church.

The future of the Wesleyan Methodist Church rests, to a great extent, in the hands of the Class Leaders. If the Class Meeting ceases to answer its original purpose, it will gradually fall into disuse, and, in a little while, will disappear. If it should die out, then what is our justification for occupying a separate position among the Churches of England? At present, we can truly say that we have revived and maintained the principle of religious fellowship. Wesley rescued that principle from threatened destruction. In a pre-eminent degree, the Methodist Church stands out before all ecclesiastical organisations as the representative of the Brotherhood of Christians. If the Class Meeting should fall into feebleness and perish, Methodism might as well submit to absorption by some more powerful religious community. Let the Leaders ponder this matter. Let them magnify their office by making it answer the purpose of its original creation. Let every one to whom a Class has been committed renew the vow of whole-hearted dedication

to God. Refusing to be influenced by discussions which dishearten the Church, let all Methodist Class Leaders yield themselves to this work which has been so signally owned in the past, and which has within it the promise of infinite good for the future.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FINANCE OF THE CLASS MEETING.

IT has been shown that the division of the Methodist Societies into Classes arose out of a suggestion concerning the debt which pressed on the Bristol Preaching-House. The Plan proposed not only provided for the gradual discharge of that debt, but it was a revealer of modes of work and management which have determined the character of Methodism. The revelation of the easy way in which money might be raised to meet the constantly increasing needs of the Society was welcomed, adopted, and holds to this hour. It is not necessary that we should trace the successive applications of the Class moneys. It is enough to say that at a very early stage they were devoted to their present object, the support of the ministry.

It was not until the year 1752 that any arrangement was made for supplying a fixed allowance to the itinerant Preachers. Up to that time, the Stewards of the various Societies "supplied the Preachers with what they wanted," and were expected to furnish them with cash for their travelling expenses; but beyond this they received no money, except what might be presented to them personally by sympathetic donors. The evils incident to the latter part of the system

will be at once perceived. "Some popular Preachers had abundance, while others were comparatively destitute." In 1752 it was agreed that every Preacher "should receive twelve pounds per annum, in order to provide himself with necessaries."<sup>1</sup> At this time the Preachers lived amongst their people, going from house to house, and, like the seventy, eating such things as were set before them. As the number of Societies increased, and limits began to be placed on the ceaseless itinerating of the Preachers, the practice of living at the tables of the Members of Society was gradually discontinued. Sums were then given as "board" money and "quartermage," and important items were added to Methodist expenditure. When a Preacher married, his wife had also to be supported.

In glancing over the books which contain the record of the simple finance of the earliest Methodist Circuits, we notice the omission of several items of cost to the Societies. Nothing is said about rent, with its accompaniments of rates and taxes; and we see that no provision is made for the support of the Preacher's children. Whether a Preacher had no children or many does not appear to have been a question taken into account. In watching the growth of Methodist Circuit finance, we are especially struck with the way in which development has proceeded along the lines indicated by the omissions and the defects which we have noted.

The master-key opening the intricacies of Methodist Circuit finance is the word "maintenance." The system

<sup>1</sup> *History of the People called Methodists*, by William Myles, p. 76.

is derived from the practice of the Apostolic age. Its first suggestion is to be found in the directions which our Saviour Christ gave to those whom He sent out "two and two."<sup>1</sup> But St. Paul elaborates it, and insists upon its reasonableness.<sup>2</sup> In Methodism the idea of "maintenance" has received its fullest modern expression. Its guiding principle is that allowances to Ministers in return for their services, must not vary in accordance with their intellectual ability; that is, such moneys must not be paid as remuneration or salary, but allowances must be proportionate to the present personal family and domestic needs of each Minister. The acceptance and application of this principle has led to the development of Methodist finance.

The expansion of Methodism revealed the fact that due provision would have to be made in order to meet the larger need of the Preachers who had wives and children. In the Minutes of Conference, 1769, is this record: "Many inconveniences have arisen from the present method of providing for Preachers' wives. The Preachers who are wanted in several places cannot be sent thither because they are married. And if they are sent, the people look upon them with an evil eye, because they cannot bear the burden of their families. How may these inconveniences be remedied? Answer: Let each Society contribute what it usually does now, towards maintaining the families of married Preachers. For instance, the London Society can assist two married Preachers; let them contribute £5 a quarter." And upon twenty-four of the then thirty-

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke x. 1-9.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 1-11; 1 Tim. v. 17, 18.

two Circuits in England, various amounts were assessed ; from £2, 10s. per quarter for a very wide and poor agricultural Circuit, which included more than one county within its limits, to Newcastle-on-Tyne, which closes and heads the list with £7, 10s. per quarter. The record continues : "There is provision for six-and-thirty wives, at £2, 10s. a quarter each. At present, we have only thirty-two in England, besides those that keep themselves. But, as several of them have children, the overplus is to be divided among them as need requires. By this means, whether the Preachers in any particular Circuit are married or single, it makes no difference ; so that, without any difficulty, any Preacher may be sent into any Circuit." <sup>1</sup>

The "overplus" soon disappeared. The assessment on the Societies was insufficient to meet the necessities of the case ; and the Preacher's Fund, the Yearly Collection, the Book-Room, and a special collection which was made in answer to the appeal of John Wesley, all contributed from time to time to supplement it. This cumbersome method having served a temporary purpose was subsequently laid aside. As the financial power of the Circuits increased, the responsibility of providing for the Preacher and his wife was accepted, and "allowances" adapted to their needs were paid. The Circuits which were unable to pay the whole of such allowances were permitted to claim the balance from the "Yearly Collection," care being taken that all such claims for "ordinary" or "extraordinary Deficiencies" should be duly authenticated, and scrupulously examined by the District Meetings.

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. i. pp. 86, 87.

For many years a "fierce light beat upon" a Preacher's domestic expenditure. "Board and quarterage" had a certain privacy allowed them, but "coals and candles" were consumed under the eyes of vigilant Stewards. An inquisition which no private Member of Society would have suffered in his own case, was established over a Minister's house. Stewards ablaze with zeal for economy have been known to enter the Preacher's sitting-room, and, taking up the tongs, to reduce the supply of fuel to their own conception of the financial capabilities of the Circuit. They sometimes severely cross-examined the Preacher's wife upon the excessive number of "dips" that she had used in the illumination of her humble dwelling. The advance of civilisation made this mode of meeting the expenses of the Preacher's house intolerable. It was therefore resolved that a gross amount, supposed to be adequate to cover "board," "quarterage," and various household expenses, should be given to the Preacher for the support of himself and his wife, and for household expenses; and this practice has become general. At the present time the allowance to Ministers varies in accordance with locality, and with Circuit resource and generosity; but its regulating principle is still the law of "maintenance."

The arrangement for the maintenance and education of the Preacher's children is somewhat elaborate. The "gross amount" which we have mentioned is for the support of the Preacher and his wife; when the Preacher has children, then that gross sum is supplemented by an allowance of so much in respect of each child, up to a certain age. The manner in which the allowances for children are raised casts a clear light



upon the Connexional spirit which is the special genius of Methodism. In the former days we fear that Preachers' children, like their wives, were regarded with "an evil eye." At the Conference of 1770, this question was asked: "How many Preachers' wives are to be provided for? Forty-three. By what Societies? As follows" (names of Societies and "Sisters" are given). "But some have children; how are *these* to be provided for? By the Societies where they labour."<sup>1</sup> This regulation bore heavily and unequally on the Circuits. Some of the poorer Circuits found that Preachers with large families were appointed, while, it often happened, Ministers who were stationed in the wealthier Circuits had few children, or perhaps none.

At the Conference of 1809, it was "suggested that various advantages would arise from stationing the Preachers' children on particular Circuits according to a just and fair proportion." The Conference "agreed that the District Meetings should make inquiry into the number in Society, and the circumstances of the respective Circuits in their Districts, and should draw up a Plan, to be presented to the next Conference, stating how many children ought, in equity, to be provided for by each Circuit." The reports of the Districts having been examined by the Conference, it was further agreed that "a general Plan for stationing the children should be drawn up." In 1818 the Conference directed that "in the next District Meetings, when the Circuit Stewards were present, they should be requested to take into consideration the propriety of making every District

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. i. pp. 93, 94.

responsible for providing within itself, and by its own local resources, the allowances for such a number of Preachers' children as would fairly belong to it according to the principle of proportion to numbers in Society, leaving it, however, to the Preachers and Stewards assembled in each District Meeting to modify the application of that general principle from year to year, according to their discretion, by relieving the more burdened Circuits of their own District; so, however, as that the whole quota of each District for children should be raised within itself."<sup>1</sup> This plan was fully discussed by the District Meetings, and its "principle and outline were very generally approved." The Conference of 1819, therefore, proceeded to legislate on the subject, and the Children's Fund was constituted. It stands as a monument to the financial, legislative, and administrative ability of Jabez Bunting.

In recent years, owing to altered circumstances, the method of assessing on the number of Members of Society has been found not in harmony with the original principle—"providing for the Preachers' children in a fair and equitable manner." The assessment bore heavily upon Circuits having a large membership and small resources. After much discussion, the Conference of 1883, in its Representative Session, directed: "That, in future, the mode of assessment on the Districts shall be at varying rates per Minister, and that such rates shall be determined by the number of Members in Society, and financial ability. And in estimating the financial ability of a District, the following shall be taken into account: Circuit Income, Seat Rents,

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. iv. p. 454.

Ordinary Contributions to our Funds, with Sunday School Income.”<sup>1</sup>

This scheme is now in operation. The Conference, in its Representative Session, determines the rate per Minister in the respective *Districts* of the Connexion; and the Financial District Meeting determines the rate per Minister in the respective *Circuits* of the District. The new scheme should be mastered by Leaders, who ought to understand in order that they may explain the principles of Methodist Finance.

The effect of the working of the Children's Fund has been very beneficial. Whilst the claim of a Minister, for the support of his family, on the Circuit where he labours is maintained, yet by the action of the Fund, the aggregate charges for Ministers' children are so distributed over the Connexion that no injustice is done to the weaker Circuits. “A varying rate per Minister” means an evenly apportioned pressure upon Circuits.

The Children's Fund does not stand alone. Not only have the children to be clothed and fed, they have to be educated. A Connexional Fund, until recently called the Schools' Fund, now to be known as the “Education” Branch of the Children's Fund, exists for the purpose of assisting in that education. Out of this Fund, a sum of twelve pounds a year is paid in respect of each child for six years; and this sum is expended by the parents in one of two ways. In the great majority of cases the money is spent on the education of children who live at home. In a minority of cases, however, the twelve pounds received from the Schools' Fund is added to the six

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, 1883, p. 248.

guineas received from the Children's Fund, and, in consideration of the payment of these two amounts, the boys receive an admirable education at Kingswood, and the girls at Queenswood or Trinity Hall Schools. The Schools' Fund derives its income from Public Collections, Private Subscriptions, Ministerial Subscriptions, and an Assessment on the Circuits. The latter fact brings it within the view of the Leader, as any contribution from the Circuit Funds touches the finance of the Class Meeting.

Class Meeting finance is divided into two sections; contributions towards the support of the ministry in the Circuit, and contributions towards Connexional Funds. From a very early stage of Methodist history, Leaders have received moneys from the Members of their Classes for the support of the ministry. Those moneys were paid weekly and quarterly; the latter when the Tickets were renewed by the Preacher. Wesley, in the Minutes of Conference for 1782, states "the original Rule," in the following terms: "Every Member contributes one penny weekly (unless he is in extreme poverty), and one shilling quarterly."<sup>1</sup> In order that the quarterly contribution might not press hardly on the poor, John Wesley said: "Let the Assistant ask every person, at changing his Ticket, Can you *afford* to observe our Rule? and receive what he is able to give."<sup>1</sup>

It must not be supposed that no larger sums than those named were contributed in the Classes. It has always been the practice in Methodism for the richer Members to make up the monetary deficiencies created by those who are unable to give because of

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. i. p. 158.

“extreme poverty.” When Captain Foy’s plan was criticised by some one who said that many of the Members of the Bristol Society were poor, and could not afford to give a penny a week, he replied: “Put eleven of the poorest with me; and if they can give anything, well. I will call on them weekly; and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself. And each of you call on eleven of your neighbours weekly; receive what they give, and make up what is wanting.” That sentence struck a keynote in Methodist finance which has been sustained to this hour. “Every man according to his several ability” is supposed to contribute in the Classes towards the cause of God.

In cases of “extreme poverty,” or of temporary inability through passing circumstances, the Leader exercises a wise discretion, and takes care that no undue pressure is brought to bear upon those who are struggling for their daily bread. It is a remarkable fact that some of the most generous contributors in the Classes are persons who are far from being rich according to this world’s reckoning. In a Class held in a London “slum,” some of the Members used to give three halfpence a week, in order that the additional halfpenny weekly might amount to sixpence at the end of the quarter. A whole sixpence at once “for the Ticket” was quite beyond their power; so the ingenuity of true benevolence found out a way of escape. This and similar cases emphasize the need of collecting the moneys in the Classes week by week. Such a mode lightens the burden which generous but poor Members so willingly bear; and it also prevents the overtaxing of the resources of persons of moderate

means. John Wesley said: "Let every Leader receive the *weekly* contribution from each person in his Class."<sup>1</sup>

The contributions in the Classes form an exceedingly important part of the income of a Circuit. The returns which were made to the writer, to assist in the last revision of the assessment for the Children's Fund, indicate that the Circuits in England, Scotland, and Wales raise about £343,000 per annum for the support of the ministry. The Schedules show that the proportion of Class moneys to Quarterly Collections and Offertories varies widely in different parts of the country. There can be no doubt, however, that the Classes are the main sources from which the Circuit Stewards obtain their supplies. We should judge that nearly £150,000 a year is derived from the pence and shillings and larger offerings collected by the Leaders. That fact alone makes an irresistible appeal to the man who feels himself responsible for the stability of Methodist finance.

The second branch of Class Meeting finance relates to contributions to two Connexional Funds. In March, a collection is made for the Home Mission and Contingent Fund. The first suggestion leading to the establishment of this Fund seems to have been made in the Conference of 1749. At the Conference of 1756 "the nature and necessity of the Yearly Subscription" was fully explained, and earnestly recommended to all the Societies. It had been made in a few of them before that time, but then it was recommended to be made in the Classes at the December Visitation, and received at the March Visitation fol-

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. i. p. 158.

lowing, in order\* to defray the expenses occasioned—  
 “1. By building Preaching-Houses from the year 1740 to the present time, 1756. 2. By sending out Preachers who were able and willing to travel, but who could not provide themselves with necessaries. 3. To support the Preachers while labouring in the poor Circuits in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. 4. To enable them to take the benefit of the Law when persecuted by wicked and unreasonable men.” Wesley issued an Address to the Societies, from which the following sentences are taken :—“Men and brethren, help! Help to relieve your companions in the kingdom of Jesus, who are pressed above measure. Help to send forth able, willing labourers into the Lord’s harvest. Help to spread the Gospel of your salvation into the remotest corner of the kingdom. Let none be excluded from giving something; be it a penny, a halfpenny, or a farthing. And let those who are able to give shillings, crowns, and pounds do it willingly.”<sup>1</sup>

For fifteen years, the Yearly Collection was made in the Classes; but the amount raised did not suffice to extinguish old debts and meet new demands. The record was: “We gain little ground. What can be done to remove this heavy burden? Try a new method. Let every Methodist in England, Scotland, and Ireland give, for one year, a penny a week. Let those in each Society who are not poor pay for those who are. Let any who are so minded contribute farther weekly, as they shall see good.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *History of the People called Methodists*, by William Myles, pp. 78, 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. i. p. 100.

In 1790, the objects upon which the moneys of the General Fund were to be expended were distinctly defined.

The "General Fund" is represented to-day by the Home Mission and Contingent Fund. Its existence and support are due to the Connexional spirit which pervades Methodism. It provides for the payment of certain expenses which must be incurred in the administration of the Connexion; and still true to one of its original purposes, it extends its help to those Circuits which, without such assistance, would be unable to maintain the Ministers appointed to them. Nearly three hundred Circuits receive Ordinary Grants; and, in addition, Extraordinary Grants to meet special Circuit needs are also made from this beneficent Fund.

But it does more. The two watchwords of the Fund are Conservation and Aggression. While strengthening Methodism in rural Circuits, it also plants Methodism where hitherto it did not exist, and "comforts her waste places;" and where Methodism was "ready to perish," the kindly aid furnished by this Fund has "brought back life and hope and strength again." It sustains, in whole or in part, Home Missionary Ministers, District Missionaries, Connexional Evangelists, Ministers who work amongst soldiers and sailors, and responsible Lay Agents who render great service in various Circuits. The usefulness of the Fund is incalculable, and it deserves the generous support of every loyal Methodist. The Leader should distribute the explanatory Papers which are sent to him before the March Visitation of his Class, and should do his best to induce those of his



Members who are not present when the Tickets are renewed to contribute something, however small the amount, to this most useful Connexional Fund.

We have seen that the Methodist people have adopted the principle of "maintenance" in their arrangements for the support of their Ministers. As long as the Ministers are equal to "full work," they can depend upon the supply of their temporal need. The problem of the supply of that need when the Preacher can work no longer had to be faced by Wesley, and it has still to be faced by the Wesleyan Methodist Church. The problem was aggravated by the necessity which compelled the Conference to forbid the Preachers to supplement their allowances by entering into business. In course of time, Preachers, who had managed to maintain their wives on the slender allowances which they received from the Societies, died, and their widows were left in want.

It required special skill to devise a Plan by which the needs of Supernumerary Ministers and Ministers' Widows could be met. In this matter, as in many others, Methodism has been a pioneer, and has shown the way to avert the disgrace of abandoning Ministers to poverty when they are no longer able to work for the Church which they have served in the fulness of their strength. The Plan which was suggested by Wesley proceeded upon two principles. First, he insisted that the Preachers should help themselves, and then he exhorted his Societies to help the Preachers. Both Preachers and Members responded to his appeal, and a Fund was formed which is rich in the benedictions of those whom it has screened from painful poverty. In the early days of Method-

ism, that Fund was known as "The Preachers' Fund." To it the Preachers contributed out of their scanty allowances, and from it they received small annuities when no longer able to work. Their widows also shared its kindly aid. The Societies supplemented the Preachers' subscriptions by voluntary contributions.

In 1799 an important change was introduced into the management of the Fund. The Conference determined that the subscriptions of the Preachers should be separated from those of the Societies. The latter "should be considered as forming a Fund of Charity, to be applied only to the assistance of real objects of mercy among the supernumerary and superannuated Preachers, and the Widows of Preachers." It was also decided that "the subscriptions of the Preachers, being their own money, should be distributed according to strict and impartial rules of justice." The Rules regulating the Fund were defined, and were registered at the Bristol Quarter Sessions in 1799 and 1800. The two branches of the Fund were known respectively as the Legalised or Preachers Annuity Fund, and the Auxiliary or Merciful Fund. It was not until 1813 that the separation of the two branches of the "Preachers' Fund" was finally effected. Then "The Itinerant Methodist Preachers' Annuitant Society" was formed in Liverpool, and from thenceforth it became a separately managed, and exclusively ministerial organisation. Ministers who are Members of the Annuitant Society pay in six pounds a year, and they receive proportionate annuities when they become supernumeraries; their Widows also receiving smaller annuities during widowhood. The Fund represents the principle of "self-

help" upon which the Preachers have acted from the earliest days of Methodism.

The amount received from the Annuitant Society, however, is insufficient for the support of the Supernumerary Minister, and those who have a claim upon him; and the generous heart of the Methodist people has devised a Plan whereby that sum may be supplemented. We have seen that, true to its name, the "Old Auxiliary Fund" was a "Merciful Fund," and that its aid was limited to objects of charity among the Preachers and their Widows. In 1837 it had become plain that in consequence of the great increase in the numbers of Preachers, and the altered conditions of social and domestic life, some more complete Plan was needed for dealing with the pecuniary requirements of Supernumeraries and the Widows of Preachers. •

At the Conference of 1837 a Committee of Preachers and Laymen was appointed to meet during the next Conference, "in order to make preparations and arrangements for holding a Centenary in commemoration of the first formation of the Methodist United Society in the year 1739."<sup>1</sup> The Committee met accordingly in Bristol, and their Report contained, amongst other things, the following resolution:—  
"That this Committee earnestly recommends to the immediate consideration of the Connexion, the case of our Worn-out Ministers, and that of the Widows of our deceased Ministers. The Committee respectfully suggest the propriety and necessity of some further provision for their support upon the principle of the Children's Fund, and would be particularly gratified

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, 1837, vol. viii. p. 224.

if such an arrangement could be effected, and provision made for its future practical operation, during the coming Centenary year, believing that it would be, in connection with other modes of celebrating that occasion, an eminently fitting and beneficial testimonial of the gratitude of the Connexion to those of its Ministers who are no longer capable of regular and constant labours, and of its pious care for the Widows of those Preachers who are gone to their reward.”<sup>1</sup> The suggestion contained in this resolution was taken up. In November 1838, at a numerously attended meeting of Ministers and Laymen held in Manchester, the subject came up for discussion. “Ample evidence was afforded of the universal conviction of our people that a better provision for our Worn-out Ministers, and for the Widows of our deceased Preachers, is demanded by every principle of justice, and by every feeling of Christian sympathy and kindness, and ought not to be longer neglected or delayed.”<sup>2</sup> A Sub-Committee was appointed to prepare a Plan for accomplishing the desired object; and at a subsequent and numerously attended Meeting, held in Manchester, the Plan of the Sub-Committee was presented, considered, modified, and then unanimously approved.

The Plan was sent down to the District Meetings, in order that it might be discussed by the Circuit Stewards and other Laymen then present. The result of the reference to the District Meetings is thus stated:—“The object in view was most cordially approved by every District Meeting without exception; and the particular Plan of accomplishing

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, 1838, vol. viii. pp. 357, 358.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of Conference* 1839, vol. viii. p. 306.

it, recommended by the Committee, was also very generally considered to be, on the whole, the best that could be arranged, and indeed the only practicable and efficient Plan which has yet been suggested.”<sup>1</sup> The Reports of the District Meetings were again considered by the Centenary Committee, held during the Conference in Liverpool, 1839. The Plan of “The New Auxiliary, or Supernumerary Preachers’ and Widows’ Fund,” was settled; and on being submitted to the Conference, it was “fully adopted and sanctioned.”

The Plan is set forth at length in the “Minutes” of 1839, pp. 552-6; and the Leader who consults it will especially note that the Conference approved the suggestion that the income of the Fund should be raised mainly by a contribution in the Classes throughout the Kingdom, of not less, on the average, than<sup>1</sup> sixpence per Member. The Class Contributions commenced in 1841, and have been continued to this day. They have been largely supplemented by private Subscriptions and Public Collections, and by the special gifts of the more wealthy Members of the Methodist Church and congregations.

We have given this sketch of the processes of producing the “New Auxiliary Fund,” in order that the Leaders may recognise the fact that the honour of originating it rests especially on the Laymen of Methodism. Mr. James Wood, of Bristol, first suggested the subject in the Centenary Committee, urging the claims of the Supernumeraries and the Preachers’ Widows in a luminous and convincing speech. The Laymen of the Centenary Committee, and of the

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference, 1839*, vol. viii. p. 507; pp. 554, 555.

District Meetings, also took an active part in maturing the Plan upon which the Fund is worked. We may well style the New Auxiliary Fund, "The People's Fund." It is certainly one of the most graceful monuments of the Centenary year.

The Conference has directed that, at the Renewal of the Society Tickets during the September Visitation, "the Minister shall explain to the Members the nature and reasonableness of this claim upon their justice and liberality, and enter in the Class Book the individual subscriptions, as in the case of the Yearly Collection at the March Visitation."<sup>1</sup> These contributions must be collected by the Class Leaders not later than October, and paid in to the Society Stewards.

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, 1851, vol. xi. p. 664 ; 1890, p. 340.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE CLASS LEADER AND THE LEADERS' MEETING.

THE duty of a Leader is not confined to meeting his Class, visiting his absent Members, and receiving what each is "willing to give towards the support of the Gospel." He is also a Member of a Meeting which occupies an important position in the Methodist economy. That Meeting was created immediately after the division of the Societies into Classes. The Leaders assembled each week. They gave in their report of the spiritual condition of those who were entrusted to their care; they "informed the Preacher of any that were sick, or of any that walked disorderly and would not be reprov'd;" and "they paid to the Stewards what they had received of their several Classes in the week preceding, and showed their account of what each person had contributed." These Meetings were established throughout the Kingdom. They consisted of the Preachers stationed in the Circuit, the Stewards of the Society, the Class Leaders, and, after the formation of a separate Fund for the relief of the poor, the Poor Stewards of the Society. At the outset the proceedings were confined strictly to the business we have indicated.

Even in its simplest form the Leaders' Meeting was of exceptional value. Every week the spiritual con-

dition of the Societies was reviewed. The "Class-paper" being handed to the Preacher, he could see at once what the attendance had been. In a case of persistent absence, he could ascertain the cause; in a case of sickness, he could note the name. The Preacher was thus brought into touch with each Member, and gained a most helpful knowledge of those who had been committed to his care. It was essential that the "Assistants" throughout the Connexion should possess this knowledge. They were responsible to Wesley for the moral and spiritual state of their Societies. When he visited their Circuits, or met them in Conference, searching inquiries were made which could only be answered by those who had "a sure, thorough knowledge" of the condition of their Members.<sup>1</sup> As the responsibility of an "Assistant" was great, Wesley took care that he should be armed with adequate authority. He gave the "Assistant" power to select his own Leaders and Stewards, and to depose them from office when he thought fit; power also to admit and exclude Members at his will. If, with these powers, he failed to maintain the morality and spirituality of the Societies, the "Assistant" could not plead that his hands were not free to remove evil and evil-doers, or that he was not at liberty to fill the offices of the Society with men after his own heart—men "in whom he could most confide."

According to the "Rules of the Society," the business of the Leaders' Meeting consisted of the three subjects we have noted. In actual practice, however, other matters were occasionally introduced, and made the subject of conversation. John Wesley was accustomed

<sup>1</sup> Wesley's *Journal*, March 25th, 1742.



to ask the opinion of some of his Leaders' Meetings upon questions which concerned the interests of their particular Societies, and his action was influenced by their counsel. His example was followed by his "Assistants." As a consequence, the Leaders' Meeting grew in importance. As it consisted of men in whom Wesley and his "Assistants" could "most confide," it became a kind of Cabinet Council; and in cases of perplexity and emergency the advice of its Members was sought and welcomed by the Preachers.

This practice, however, was not without its inconvenience. That inconvenience was revealed during the life of Wesley. In his Journal he cites a case in which much confusion had arisen from the attempt of certain Leaders to get "at the top of all, above the Stewards, the Preachers, yea, and above the Assistant himself." It was well that this danger showed itself so soon. It enabled Wesley to point out that, "in the Methodist discipline, the wheels regularly stand thus: The Assistant, the Preachers, the Stewards, the Leaders, and the People;" and it also saved the Leaders' Meeting from being diverted from its spiritual work, and from becoming a kind of General Committee of Management charged with the direction and administration of the miscellaneous business of the Society and congregation. Its position is much more dignified; and all who appreciate that position should resist every attempt to interfere with its original design.

In passing, we may say that Wesley's ruling as to the relative position of Methodist officials still regulates the Constitution. Since his death, however, certain changes have been introduced which have

modified the almost unrestricted power which the Preachers, as Wesley's representatives and vicegerents, formerly possessed. Those changes are the result of the frank consultations which took place at the close of the last century between the Conference and the Representatives of the people. They are expressed in two supremely important documents known respectively as the "Plan of Pacification," which was accepted in 1795,<sup>1</sup> and the "Leeds Regulations," which were passed by the Conference in 1797.<sup>1</sup> The "agitations" which have shaken the Methodist Societies have left the foundation principles of these documents intact. In 1835, and again in 1852, considerable constitutional changes were made, but they only concerned procedure, and were in harmony with the legislation of 1795 and 1797.

The Methodist people, while anxious to make their house a more comfortable habitation, have wisely refrained from periodically tearing up its foundations. Those foundations have been inspected, and have been found to be firm; and so the alterations have been in keeping with the original structure. We refer the Leaders to such a book as Dr. Smith's invaluable *History of Wesleyan Methodism* for full information concerning the cause and character of the changes which, up to 1861, had determined the present form of the Methodist Constitution. It will be enough for our purpose if, in our description of the functions of the Leaders' Meeting, we indicate such modifications of primitive methods as have a direct bearing on its proceedings.

The constitution of a Leaders' Meeting was formally

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. i. pp. 340-343; pp. 390-397.

defined by the Conference of 1874. "The Leaders' Meeting shall consist of (1) the Ministers and Preachers on trial who are appointed to the work of the Circuit; (2) the Leaders of the Society, the Society Stewards, the Stewards of the Poor Fund, and any Circuit Steward or Stewards who may be Members of that Society." The Conference also directed that when a Secretary is appointed in any Leaders' Meeting, such Secretary must be chosen from among the Members of that Meeting.<sup>1</sup> It will be seen, therefore, that the composition of the Leaders' Meeting has direct regard to its work. That work is strictly related to the Classes; the Stewards representing their financial aspect, and the Leaders their spiritual condition. As may be inferred from its constitution, the Leaders' Meeting has no right to interfere with matters which merely concern congregations and chapels. Such matters are under the direction of the Ministers, or, in some cases, the Superintendent and the Trustees unitedly.

The Superintendent of the Circuit is *ex officio* the Chairman of the Leaders' Meeting. In his absence, one of his colleagues presides. No meeting of Leaders is a "Leaders' Meeting" unless a Minister is in the chair; its action would not be legal, nor its decisions valid. The Chairman is responsible for the proper conduct of the business. He is the representative of the Conference, and the Conference regularly inquires into the manner in which he has discharged his duty. He has to observe and maintain the discipline of the Connexion. In 1806 the Conference declared: "All our Rules are equally binding on both the Preachers and the people; and therefore every Superintend-

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. xix. p. 454.

ent who permits a vote to be taken on the execution or rejection of them, shall, on proof at the ensuing Conference, be deprived of the office of Superintendent.”<sup>1</sup> “Keep our Rules and our Rules will keep you,” has passed into a Methodist maxim, and its truth has been demonstrated in numberless cases.

We have seen that, during Wesley's lifetime, the “Assistant” had the right to select his own Stewards and Leaders; and therefore, practically, to determine the composition of his Leaders' Meeting. In 1797 the Conference resolved—“No person shall be appointed a Leader or Steward, or be removed from his office, but in conjunction with the Leaders' Meeting; the nomination to be in the Superintendent, and the approbation or disapprobation in the Leaders' Meeting.”<sup>2</sup> This mode of appointing Stewards, the Society and Poor Stewards, and also Class Leaders, is still in force. Before, however, a Leader is appointed, he ought to be examined privately by the Superintendent in the most essential points of Christian doctrine, experience, and practice; and also in the chief features of Methodist discipline. “Let us never nominate a new Leader until we have conscientiously satisfied ourselves, by previous inquiry and personal examination, as to the character and qualifications of the person proposed. And wherever a new Leader, nominated by us and accepted by the Leaders' Meeting, shall be first introduced into the Meeting, let us take that opportunity of stating the duties which belong to the office, and of enforcing them on all Leaders present.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. ii. p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. i. p. 391.

<sup>3</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, 1820, vol. v. pp. 149, 150.

Being examined, nominated, appointed, and specially instructed in the duties of his new office, the new Leader ought, in addition, to be intensely conscious of his responsibility as a Member of the Leaders' Meeting. As it is the duty of the Members to attend regularly the Class Meetings, so it is the duty of the Leader to attend regularly the Leaders' Meeting. He should bring his Class Book and hand it to the Minister, that he may examine it, and take note of the sick, and inquire concerning the absent. The Leader should also inform the Minister of any Members who need urgent or special pastoral visitation; and, at the proper time, should pay over to the Stewards all Society and Connexional moneys collected in his Class. It is only by the habitual attendance of the Leaders at these Meetings that the system of Methodism can be worked. "Regular Leaders' Meetings have, from the beginning, been found essential to the pastoral care and spiritual prosperity of our Societies, as well as to the orderly transaction of their financial concerns."<sup>1</sup>

It must always be remembered that the Leaders' Meeting stands in the closest relation to the spiritual work of the Church. The words of the Report of the Committee on Church Membership, referring to this subject, should be seriously pondered: "It is of the greatest importance that the Leaders' Meeting should be restored to its former place of spiritual influence and power. It should be remembered that the Leaders' Meeting is not a mere instrument for collecting the contributions of the Classes, for administering poor relief, and for making certain administrative arrangements. Its purpose is to enable the Ministers,

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference, 1826, vol. vi. p. 168.*

with the help of the Leaders, to guard and promote the spiritual well-being of the Societies. The Meeting should, therefore, be held frequently and regularly ; if possible, weekly, according to rule. The Class Books should be examined by the Minister, and note taken of any Members who, because of affliction, or poverty, or spiritual declension, need special attention. The Leaders themselves should be conversed with as to how they are prospering in their own souls, and how their Classes are prospering. In accordance with a Regulation passed many years ago, and productive of great blessing, an entire Meeting should, at least once a quarter, be given up to prayer and testimony, and heart-searching conversation in reference to the Leaders' special work. Further, the introduction of a new Leader should be made with all solemnity ; our Rules as to his examination being carefully observed. In a word, the Leaders' Meeting should be made the spiritual centre of the Society. If this were done, not only would the existing Leaders be more efficient and useful, but the succession of competent and spiritually powerful Leaders would more easily be maintained."<sup>1</sup>

The relation of the Leaders' Meeting to the Members of the Classes is clearly shown in the Minutes of Conference. The right of admission and exclusion from membership is still in the hands of the Pastors of the Church. But the unrestricted power which they formerly exercised is now limited. We have already quoted the Rule of 1797 : "The Leaders' Meeting shall have a right to declare any person on trial improper to be received into the Society ; and

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, 1889, p. 410.

after such declaration, the Superintendent shall not admit such person into the Society." Grindrod says: "The Rule was intended for cases out of the common course, in which some of the parties concerned make their appeal to the Leaders' Meeting."<sup>1</sup> As a general practice, the Ministers admit to membership on the recommendation of the Leaders; and the number of cases referred to the Leaders' Meetings is infinitesimally small.

The legislation concerning the admission of Members is simple; that which refers to their exclusion is more elaborate. It will assist us to understand the position of the Leaders' Meeting in respect of exclusions if we remember that only cases of appeal come before it for its investigation. Ordinary cases are dealt with by the Minister in the course of his ordinary pastoral Visitation of the Classes. The Conference, in 1835, put the case authoritatively. After quoting the Rule of 1797, which enacts that "no person shall be expelled for immorality till such immorality has been *proved at a Leaders' Meeting*," or, as this clause appears to have been afterwards explained, "*proved to the satisfaction of a Leaders' Meeting*," the Minutes proceed:—

"The case to which this Rule of 1797 applies must necessarily be understood as being that of a Member who *demand a trial* at a Leaders' Meeting. 'The far greater number,' it is truly stated, '*exclude themselves* by utterly forsaking us.' Continued absence from the Class Meeting or other means of grace, without any sufficient reason, or some manifest breach of the laws of God, or of the particular Rules

<sup>1</sup> *Compendium*, p. 143, footnote.

of our own Connexion, is usually in such cases reported by the Class Leader to the Preacher at the time of the Quarterly Visitation. If there be no denial of the fact, or satisfactory defence against the charge, on the part of the Member, or of his friends who may be present; and if the Preacher, in the case of alleged crime or misconduct, be of opinion that the offence is one of such grave and serious character as to require some public testimony of disapprobation, the immediate exclusion of the negligent or offending Member has usually resulted quietly, and, as a matter of course, by the Preacher's withholding his Society Ticket, and erasing his name from the Class Book.

"But if the Member so charged deny the allegation of a wilful neglect of our peculiar discipline as to Class Meetings, etc., or of a breach of some law of Scripture, or Rule of Methodism, and demand a trial, for the proof or disproof thereof, before the Leaders' Meeting, or before a Committee of Leaders appointed by that Meeting, then such trial must, as our law now stands, and has stood ever since 1797, be forthwith conceded. If a majority of the Leaders, who vote at the meeting, shall be 'satisfied' that sufficient proof is adduced to establish the fact of a wilful and habitual negligence, or of the violation of some Scriptural or Methodistical rule, and shall give a verdict to that effect, then the Leaders' Meeting has discharged *its whole part* of the painful duty to be performed, and the case is left in the hands of the Superintendent. On *him* devolves, in his pastoral character, as the person whose peculiar call and province it is to 'watch over that soul' as one that 'must give an account,' the sole right and duty of deciding on the



measures to be adopted towards the offender, in consequence of the verdict thus pronounced.”<sup>1</sup> The whole of the legislation of the Conferences of 1835 and 1852,<sup>2</sup> relating to the exclusion of Members, should be studied by the Leader who is wishful to discharge his duty in an intelligent manner.

In dealing with the subject of the exclusion of Members, it is necessary to say that the trial of a Member of Society, who is also a Trustee of a chapel, is treated as a special case. Such a person, “however accused or defective in conforming to the established Rules of the Society,” cannot be excluded from membership, “unless his crime or breach of the Rules of the Society be proved,” not only in the presence of the Leaders of the Society of which he is a Member, but also of the Trustees of the chapel with which that Society is connected, such Trustees being themselves Members of the Society in the Circuit; or if there is no such chapel, then the Trustees of the chapel in connection with the principal Society in the Circuit Town.

The procedure in the case of “Commercial Failures” is also special, and will be found in the “Compendium of Later Regulations” at the close of this volume.

As a general rule, discipline over the Ministers is exercised exclusively by the Conference. It acts through its Ministerial Committees, and, in case of need, a Minor District Meeting, or even a Special District Meeting, is summoned to deal with an offender. The “Plan of Pacification,” however, contains a provision which affects the Leaders’ Meeting, and must therefore be noticed. In case a charge of immorality,

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. vii. pp. 578-580.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, vol. xii. p. 116.

error in doctrine, deficiency in abilities, or of breach of some Rule contained in the "Plan of Pacification" is preferred against a Minister, appointed to a particular Circuit, by a majority of Trustees, or a majority of the Stewards and Leaders of any Society in that Circuit,—then that majority has power to summon the Preachers of the District, and all the Trustees, Stewards, and Leaders of the Circuit, to meet in their chapel on a day and hour appointed. This assembly is called the Mixed District Meeting, and in it every Preacher, Trustee, Steward, and Leader has a vote. If the majority of the meeting judge that the charge against the accused Minister is proved, he is considered as removed from the Circuit. In case the Ministerial District Committee does not appoint a Preacher to the Circuit in the place of the Preacher who has been removed, within a month, the majority of the Trustees, Stewards, and Leaders, being again regularly summoned, have power to appoint a Preacher to the Circuit, "provided he be a Member of the Methodist Connexion, till the ensuing Conference."<sup>1</sup> The efficiency of Ministerial Disciplinary Committees is attested by the fact that the summoning of a Mixed District Meeting is an almost unknown event.

We have said that the Leaders' Meeting is strictly related to the Classes, and that it has no jurisdiction over the affairs of the chapel or congregation. The Leaders' Meeting, however, has a right to memorialise the Conference on "the subjects which seriously and manifestly involve the spiritual interests of the Classes placed under their care, or the religious prosperity of the Society to which they are severally attached."

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes*, vol. i. p. 341.

This right has to be exercised "*peaceably and prudently*"; on such occasions *only* as seem to justify or require an extraordinary interference, with a cautious avoidance of those subjects of Memorial which do not immediately and directly affect that particular portion of our Society to which the Leaders are attached; and finally, with a careful abstinence from all such assumptions of *authority* as neither our Rules nor the general principles of justice and of religious liberty will sanction, in reference to the local regulations and usages of *other* Societies, Congregations, and Circuits." <sup>1</sup>

We may also note that the Leaders' Meeting is related to the Sunday School. In the "General Principles" on which the Conference recommends that Sunday Schools should be conducted, it is provided that the Leaders' Meeting shall choose a proportion of the Members of the Sunday School Committee. Of the non-official Members, "one-third, being Members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society, shall be chosen by the Leaders' Meeting in the month of December." The Conference has, further, enacted that "no person shall be continued as an Officer or Teacher who shall at any time be declared, by the Committee or the Leaders' Meeting, unfit, in respect of general character or religious opinions, for the office he sustains, or for taking part in the Christian education of the young." <sup>2</sup>

In conclusion, it must be remembered that the Leaders' Meeting is closely related to the Circuit Quarterly Meeting. The connection is financial and spiritual. The moneys collected by the Leaders in their Classes for the support of the Ministry should

<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, 1828, vol. vi. pp. 399-400.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of Conference*, 1873, vol. xix. pp. 174-176.

be paid in to the Society Stewards at the Leaders' Meeting, which is usually held before the Quarterly Meeting. The Society Stewards should be saved all unnecessary trouble in collecting the Class and Ticket moneys; and they, in their turn, should place the moneys they have collected in the hands of the Circuit Stewards in sufficient time to enable them to make up their accounts. The Leaders and Society Stewards should do their utmost to improve the financial condition of their Circuits, for it has been incontestably proved that Circuit financial embarrassment is a fruitful source of depression and weakness. The Members of a Quarterly Meeting, in which income and expenditure balance, have time to turn their attention to the spiritual condition of the Circuit. It is at this point that the influence of the Leaders should be especially felt. There are some Leaders whose presence in a Quarterly Meeting is an inspiration. Their prayers, their counsels, the glow of their speech and the brightness of their aspect chase away the spirit of strife, and increase the courage of every man who is fighting against sin, and attempting to win the world for Christ. It would be well if the Class Leaders of Methodism would determine to make their spiritual power in the Quarterly Meetings conspicuous. Let them set an example of devotion to God, and to men, for Christ's sake. Their special work gives them an insight into the dangers which threaten a man when subjected to the influence of the world. They know how much watchfulness and prayer are needed to prevent that influence from becoming triumphant. Is not the case somewhat similar with our Church Courts? It requires the

utmost vigilance to guard our Business Meetings against the invasion of the spirit of the world. Is it not fitting that those who are skilled in counselling their Members to resist the blight of worldliness should use their knowledge to preserve our Quarterly Meetings from everything that injures their character as Christian assemblies? Life is passing quickly, and the moment will soon come when we shall be compelled to relinquish the work which we are now trying to do. Our heart often reproaches us because of our failures. As we look back, we seem to have done nothing for Him who has done so much for us. The sense of our unworthiness will be deepened when the end of our path is reached. It will, doubtless, sadden our hearts. But, even in that hour of pensive musing, it will be a consolation to know that we have never wittingly spoken a word that has hindered the cause of Christ; that we have never lowered the spiritual tone of any company of Christian workers; that we have always tried to witness for our Master, striving, with all our might, to make men conscious of His presence and His love

## APPENDIX.



- I. THE RULES OF THE SOCIETY OF THE PEOPLE CALLED  
METHODISTS.
- II. COMPENDIUM OF LATER REGULATIONS.
- III. BOOKS SUITABLE FOR CLASS LEADERS.

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ALL our Rules are equally binding on both the Preachers and the people; and therefore every Superintendent who permits a vote to be taken on the execution or rejection of them shall, on proof at the ensuing Conference, be deprived of the office of Superintendent (*Minutes of Conference*, vol. ii. p. 348).

(Q.) Are there any directions to be given to the Preachers?—(A.) Let the Rules of the Society be read in every Society once a quarter (*Minutes*, vol. i. p. 224).

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The Conference resolves—That the Superintendents be directed to read to the first Quarterly Meeting after each Conference “any new Rule for the Societies at large” (*Minutes*, vol. xii. p. 117).

Do not mend our Rules, but keep them, and that for conscience sake (*Minutes*, vol. i. p. 678).

## APPENDIX I.



### THE RULES OF THE SOCIETY OF THE PEOPLE CALLED METHODISTS.

(See Wesley's *Works*, vol. viii. pp. 259-261. Ed. 1856.)

1. IN the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together; which, from thenceforward, they did every week, namely, on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), I gave those advices, from time to time, which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

2. This was the rise of the UNITED SOCIETY, first in London, and then in other places. Such a Society is no other than "a company of men having the form, and seeking the power, of godliness; united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one



another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

3. That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each Society is divided into smaller companies, called Classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every class, one of whom is styled *the Leader*. It is his business—

(1) To see each person in his Class once a week at least, in order

To inquire how their souls prosper ;

To advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require ;

To receive what they are willing to give towards the support of the Gospel.

(2) To meet the Ministers and the Stewards of the Society once a week, in order

To inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved ;

To pay to the Stewards what they have received of their several Classes in the week preceding ; and

To show their account of what each person has contributed.

4. There is one only condition previously required of those who desire admission into these Societies,—a desire "to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

*First*, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind, especially that which is most generally practised. Such is—

The taking the name of God in vain ;

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling ;

Drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors,

or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity ;

Fighting, quarrelling, brawling ; brother going to law with brother ; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing ; the using many words in buying or selling ;

The buying or selling uncustomed goods ;

The giving or taking things on usury, that is, unlawful interest ;

Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, particularly speaking evil of Magistrates or of Ministers ;

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us ;

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as

The “ putting on of gold or costly apparel ” ;

The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus ;

The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God ;

Softness, and needless self-indulgence ;

Laying up treasures upon earth ;

Borrowing without a probability of paying, or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

5. It is expected of all who continue in these Societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

*Secondly*, By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power ; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible to all men :

To their bodies, of the ability that God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison :

To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all they have any intercourse with ; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that “ we are not to do good, unless our hearts be free to it.”

By doing good, especially to them that are of the house-

hold of faith, or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business; and so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them only.

By all possible diligence and frugality, that the Gospel be not blamed.

By running with patience the race that is set before them, "denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily;" submitting to bear the reproach of Christ; to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should "say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord's sake."

6. It is expected of all who desire to continue in these Societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

*Thirdly*, By attending upon all the ordinances of God: such are—

The public worship of God;

The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded;

The Supper of the Lord;

Family and private prayer;

Searching the Scriptures; and

Fasting or abstinence.

7. These are the General Rules of our Societies; all which we are taught of God to observe, even in His written Word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know His Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul, as they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season. But then if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

JOHN WESLEY.

CHARLES WESLEY.

May 1, 1743.

## APPENDIX II.

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*N.B.*—The references throughout this Appendix are to the latest octavo edition of *The Minutes of the Conference*, the first volume of which was issued in 1862, and to the crown octavo volumes which have been issued annually since 1878.

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### COMPENDIUM OF LATER REGULATIONS RELATING TO ADMINISTRATION AND DISCIPLINE.

#### *New Rules.*

It is determined that if at any time the Conference see it necessary to make any new Rule for the Societies at large, and such Rule should be objected to at the first Quarterly Meeting in any given Circuit, and if the major part of that Meeting be of opinion that the enforcing of such Rule in that Circuit will be injurious to the prosperity of that Circuit, it shall not be enforced in opposition to the judgment of such Quarterly Meeting, before the second Conference. But if the Rule be confirmed by the second Conference, it shall be binding to the whole Connexion. Nevertheless, the Quarterly Meetings, rejecting a new Rule, shall not, by publications, public meetings, or otherwise, make that Rule a cause of contention, but shall strive by every means to preserve the peace of the Connexion (vols. i. p. 393 ; xii. p. 117).

#### I. RELATING TO MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.

##### *Class Meetings.*

The Conference cherishes an ever-deepening conviction of the value of that spiritual fellowship with each other which

our people have been wont to maintain in a regular attendance on our Class Meetings, believing that in this course the Members of our Societies, of all ages, and all varieties of knowledge, position, and attainment, are best enabled to walk comfortably with God, to nourish that simple and ardent piety which is their only safeguard against the dangers and seductions of the age, to train up spiritually-minded Office-bearers for future service, and to prepare to render up their final account with joy. The Conference, therefore, exhorts all our Ministers to watch over our Class Meetings with holy jealousy, and to use every effort to maintain them strictly in all their efficiency, directing both their public instructions and their private pastoral influence toward this object with unceasing diligence (vol. xiii. p. 110).

Let each Leader carefully inquire how every soul in his Class prospers, not only how each person observes the outward Rules, but how he grows in the knowledge and love of God. Endeavour to make the meeting of the Classes lively and profitable (vol. i. p. 680).

Leaders should be cautioned against insisting that every Member, however timid and inexperienced, should, from the first, be expected to speak in the Meeting. It would often be well to read a short portion of God's Word at the Class Meeting. Leaders should be advised to hold a Prayer Meeting at regular intervals, and may be encouraged to use Bible Readings occasionally, provided that these are used for the purpose of evoking conversation on Christian experience. But strict care should be taken that the Meeting shall not become merely a "Bible Class." The proper business of the Class Meeting, it must never be forgotten, is spiritual fellowship and conversation (1889, p. 411).

#### *Admission into the Society.*

The spiritual concerns shall be managed by the Preachers, who have ever appointed Leaders, chosen Stewards, and admitted Members into and expelled them from the Society,

consulting their brethren, the Stewards and Leaders (vol. i. p. 314).

No Leader has power to put any person either into or out of the Society (vol. i. p. 194).

No Preacher shall give notes (admitting persons on trial) to any but those who are recommended by one he knows, or till they have met three or four times in Class.

It is the Leader's duty to give them the "Rules of the Society" the first time they meet (vol. xvii. p. 620).

Neither the Superintendents, nor any other Preachers, shall give Tickets to any till they are recommended by a Leader with whom they have met, at least two months, on trial (vol. xvii. p. 620).

The Leaders' Meeting shall have a right to declare any person on trial improper to be received into the Society, and, after such declaration, the Superintendent shall not admit such person into the Society (vol. i. p. 391).

This Rule is expounded by the Conference as follows:—"That it never was intended that the names of all those who are on trial should be laid before a Leaders' Meeting, but solely this, that if there be, in the opinion of a Leader, any reasonable objection to the character and conduct of any person who is on trial, such objection may be stated; and if the validity of the objection be established to the satisfaction of the Meeting, a Ticket shall not be given to the person so objected to at that Quarterly Visitation" (vol. ix. p. 398).

### *Recognition of New Members.*

The public and formal recognition of new Members of Society is in accordance with early Methodist usage. A public welcome given by the Society tends to encourage the new Members, whilst the formal recognition will deepen their sense of responsibility.

Such recognition might be associated with the administration of the Lord's Supper; or it might be found expedient

to recognise new Members at a Society Meeting after the Quarterly Visitation of the Classes; or, in villages, a Recognition Service might take the place of a week-night service.

The Conference, therefore, directs that, from time to time, Meetings for the recognition of new Members be held, as far as practicable, in every Circuit, subject to the discretion of the Superintendents as to the frequency and exact nature of such Meetings (1890, p. 317).

#### *Attendance at Class.*

In all cases it is to be considered as the standing rule of our Connexion, that the Preachers shall strongly *advise* and *encourage* the Members of our Societies to meet in Classes which belong to the Circuits in which they reside; and that the contrary practice, though it cannot in all cases be prohibited, is to be prudently and as far as possible discountenanced (vol. vi. p. 280).

• (Q.) Has our discipline been sufficiently enforced?—  
(A.) In some places, and in some particulars, we find it has not. Tickets have been given to certain persons who have entirely given up Class Meeting. Let our Superintendents take care to put an end to this irregularity (vol. iii. p. 156).

It must also be understood that there exists no Rule which requires a Minister to refuse a Ticket solely on the ground of irregular attendance at Class (1889, p. 409).

The far greater number of those that are separated from us exclude themselves by neglecting to meet in Class, and to use the other means of grace, and so gradually forsake us (vol. xvii. p. 621).

#### *Removal Notes.*

Let no Member removing from one Circuit to another be received into Society without a Note of Removal, signed by one of the Itinerant Preachers in the Circuit whence he has come (vol. xvii. p. 621).

The Conference is of opinion that in the case of the removal of a Member of one of the Methodist Churches to a locality in which that Church is not represented, it is advisable that arrangements should be made for the authorised transfer of such Member to any other Methodist Church existing in the neighbourhood (1888, p. 212).

*Trial and Exclusion of Members.*

Exclusion from membership in the Class Meeting involves, for the time being, excommunication from the visible Church; and this is the most serious and painful exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, to be undertaken only when necessity demands it, and under a sense of solemn responsibility (1891, p. 364).

As to the exclusion of Members our Rule is fixed, and our custom expressed in the Rules of the Society, where it is said: "These are the General Rules of our Societies; all which we are taught of God to observe, even in His written Word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know His Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul, as they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us" (vol. i. p. 365).

No person shall be expelled from the Society for immorality till such immorality be proved at a Leaders' Meeting (1797, vol. i. p. 391).

*N.B.*—This last clause appears in the *Minutes* of 1835 as "*provided to the satisfaction of the Leaders' Meeting*" (vol. vii. p. 579).

The case to which this Rule of 1797 applies must necessarily be understood as being that of a Member who *demand*s a trial at a Leaders' Meeting. "The far greater



number," it is truly stated, "*exclude themselves* by utterly forsaking us." Continued absence from the Class Meeting or other means of grace, without any sufficient reason, or some manifest breach of the laws of God, or of the particular Rules of our own Connexion, is usually in such cases reported by the Class Leader to the Preacher, at the time of the Quarterly Visitation. If there be no denial of the fact, or satisfactory defence against the charge, on the part of the Member, or of his friends who may be present, and if the Preacher, in the case of alleged crime or misconduct, be of opinion that the offence is one of such grave and serious character as to require some public testimony of disapprobation, the immediate exclusion of the negligent or offending Member has usually resulted quietly, and as a matter of course, by the Preacher's withholding his Society Ticket, and erasing his name from the Class Book.

But if the Member so charged deny the allegation of a wilful neglect of our peculiar discipline as to Class Meetings, etc., or of a breach of some law of Scripture, or Rule of Methodism, and demand a trial, for the proof or disproof thereof, before the Leaders' Meeting, or before a Committee of Leaders appointed by that Meeting, then such trial must, as our law now stands, and has stood ever since 1797, be forthwith conceded. If a majority of the Leaders, who vote at the Meeting, shall be "satisfied" that sufficient proof is adduced to establish the fact of a wilful and habitual negligence, or of the violation of some Scriptural or Methodistical Rule, and shall give a verdict to that effect, then the Leaders' Meeting has discharged *its whole part* of the painful duty to be performed, and the case is left in the hands of the Superintendent. On *him* devolves, in his pastoral character, as the person whose peculiar call and province it is to "watch over that soul," as one that "must give an account," the sole right and duty of deciding on the measures to be adopted towards the offender, in consequence of the verdict thus pronounced. He must consider his solemn responsi-

bility, personally and officially, to God and to the Church of Christ, and his special obligation to care most tenderly and anxiously for the spiritual and eternal welfare of the individual whose conduct is implicated ; and, impartially applying the laws of God, as found in the Holy Scriptures, or the specific Rules of our body (as the case may be), to the facts which have been declared to have been proved, as involving a violation of those laws or rules, he must prayerfully form the best judgment he can, respecting the nature and degree of the ecclesiastical penalty most fit to be inflicted ; whether censure or reproof, in private or in public,—temporary suspension from Methodistical privileges,—putting the Member back again into a state of mere probation,—or, finally, the extreme penalty of expulsion. . . . (1) No sentence of expulsion shall hereafter be pronounced by any Superintendent *in the same Meeting* at which the *trial* shall have taken place. To afford time for full inquiry into the past character of the party, and other circumstances, and for calm and careful deliberation, the sentence shall be deferred for *at least one week* after the trial, unless the Superintendent be fully satisfied at once that the case is one in which some of the milder forms of discipline should alone be adopted, and that expulsion is not at all to be contemplated. (2) In difficult or doubtful cases, the Superintendent is now further directed not to proceed to the actual sentence of expulsion without privately asking information from such individual Leaders, or other judicious and experienced Members of the Society, as are most likely to put him into full possession of all the circumstances necessary to his forming, with due discretion and caution, his own final judgment on the subject. (3) Every case of proposed expulsion shall be brought by the Superintendent before the Weekly Meeting of the Preachers of his Circuit, in order that he may have the advantage of hearing the opinions and advice of his colleagues and co-Pastors before he shall finally decide on the course he ought to adopt. (4) In all cases of dissatisfaction

with the sentence of expulsion pronounced by a Superintendent, the aggrieved person shall have, as heretofore, the right of appeal to the Annual Meeting of the Preachers of his District, and even, if still dissatisfied, to the Conference, who will hear him by a Committee, or by a Special Deputation, and endeavour to decide according to truth, and to the requirements of Holy Scripture, and of our discipline.

(5) But as it is readily admitted that the appeal to the full District Committee, or to the Conference, may possibly be found, practically, too inconvenient to admit of a sufficiently prompt and easy application, except in cases of extraordinary interest and importance, the Conference now agrees and resolves, That the principle of the Rule of 1793, respecting the appointment of *Minor* District Committees in the case of Preachers, shall be extended also to the case of all excluded Members who choose to avail themselves of its provisions (vol. vii. pp. 579-581. See below, *Minor District Meetings*).

- It is already decided (*Minutes*, 1835, vol. vii. p. 579) that the first ground on which a trial before a Leaders' Meeting is to be conceded to an accused Member is, that the person complained against should deny the charge brought against him. But if the party charged refuses, in the presence of the Leaders' Meeting, either to admit or deny the charge preferred against him, it is hereby declared to be the judgment of the Conference that he is not entitled to *demand* the production of evidence, nor to claim that his trial should be proceeded with; but the authorities concerned may justly assume that the allegations cannot be denied with truth. Yet, in some cases, it may be competent to the party bringing the complaint to offer proof of the matters charged, if the Superintendent deem it most conducive to the ends of Christian discipline to adopt such a course (vol. xi. p. 482).

When a charge is brought against any Member resident in a place where no Leaders' Meeting is statedly held, the case shall be referred for investigation to the Leaders'

Meeting of the principal Society in the Circuit town. The Leader or Leaders, and the Society Stewards, of the Society of which the accused is a Member, shall be associated with the Leaders' Meeting for the purposes of the investigation (vol. xviii. p. 656).

When a Class is visited by a Minister for the renewal of Tickets, and such offensive and disorderly language or conduct is voluntarily obtruded by a Member present, as in the judgment of the Minister may render it highly improper for him to renew the Ticket of that Member until after private conversation with him, the Minister may delay the renewal of a Ticket accordingly. And if the result of such private conversation should be unsatisfactory the Minister may still retain the Ticket, if he judge it right so to do; but, *in that case*, he shall inform the person concerned that he may *demand a trial at a Leaders' Meeting*; and shall also report the case, *first*, to the next Weekly Meeting of the Ministers of the Circuit, and *then* to the Leaders' Meeting of that Society to which the party belongs (vol. xii. p. 116).

*Trial of Members who are also Trustees.*

No Trustee, however accused, or defective in conformity to the Rules of the Society, shall be removed from the Society, unless his crime or breach of rule be proved in the presence of the Trustees and Leaders; namely, the Leaders' Meeting of the particular Society of which he is a Member, together with the Trustees of the Chapel with which that Society is connected, such Trustees being themselves Members of the Methodist Society (vol. xvii. p. 625).

If the accused person is a Trustee, then there shall also be associated with the Leaders' Meeting the Trustees of the Chapel with which the Society of which he is a Member is connected; or, if there is no such Chapel, then the Trustees of the Chapel in connection with the principal Society in the Circuit town. But no Trustee shall, in either case, be so

associated, unless he is himself a Member of Society in the same Circuit (vol. xviii. p. 656).

*Appeals in Cases of Discipline.*

The Conference resolves that no appeal shall be received after the completion of the year following the Conference immediately succeeding the act of discipline, except by special decision of the Conference (1891, p. 229).

*Re-admission into the Society.*

(Q.) May a relapser into gross sin, showing signs of repentance, be immediately re-admitted into the Society?—

(A.) Not till after three months (vol. i. p. 40).

(Q.) Should any Assistant take into the Society any whom his predecessor has put out?—(A.) Not without consulting him (vol. i. p. 141).

• *Contributions in the Classes.*

*Weekly and Quarterly.*—(Q.) Have the weekly and quarterly contributions been duly made in all our Societies?—(A.) In many they have been shamefully neglected. To remedy this—(1) Let every Assistant remind every Society that this was our original rule: Every Member contributes One Penny weekly (unless he is in extreme poverty), and One Shilling quarterly. Explain the reasonableness of this. (2) Let every Leader receive the weekly contribution from each person in his class. (3) Let the Assistant ask every person, at changing his ticket, Can you afford to observe our rule? and receive what he is able to give (vol. i. p. 158).

*N.B.*—In 1812 the Conference directed that the foregoing Rules should be “reprinted in every future edition of the Society Rules” (vol. iii. p. 293).

*Auxiliary Fund.*—The Conference directs that, at the renewal of the Society Tickets during the September Visitation, every Minister shall fully explain to the Members the

nature and reasonableness of those claims upon their justice and liberality which were intended to be met by the establishment of this Fund. He shall then enter in the Class Book the individual subscriptions. At the *first* or *second* Class Meetings in the month of October, the Leader shall collect the subscriptions thus promised, and shall pay the same to the Circuit Treasurer. Each Circuit is to be responsible to the General Treasurers for a yearly sum equal at the least, on a general average of all the Societies included within that Circuit, to Sixpence per Member, the numbers for the Circuit being taken, in all cases, as returned to the preceding Conference, and published in the *Minutes* (vol. xiii. p. 112).

*Society Meetings.*

We particularly require that the Societies shall be frequently met, *apart from the congregation at large*, and suitably addressed on the various relative duties, on the due sanctification of the Sabbath, and other appropriate topics (vol. vi. p. 65).

The frequent meeting of our Societies is of great importance to the establishment and perpetuation of the work of God among our people; and the Conference again directs, that in every place where there is preaching on the Lord's Day, the Preachers shall regularly meet the Societies according to our original practice; and that when they visit the country places on week-days only, they shall, as often as is consistent with their other duties, meet the Societies on those evenings.

In addition to the practice of meeting the Societies weekly on the evening of the Lord's Day, the Conference recommends that the Preachers should appoint times, whether once in a month or once in a quarter, for holding Special Society Meetings, either on the afternoon of the Sabbath, or on some evening of the week, to be devoted exclusively to that purpose, when, if practicable, all the Preachers of the Circuit should be present, and unite in endeavouring to make such

Special Society Meetings instructive and useful to our people (vol. viii. p. 87).

Let the Preachers be careful to see that the Members show their Tickets regularly before their admission to Society Meetings (vol. iii. p. 387).

*Leaders' Meetings.*

*Constitution.*—(1) The Ministers and Preachers on Trial who are appointed to the work of the Circuit.

(2) The Leaders of the Society, the Society Stewards, the Stewards of the Poor Fund, and any Circuit Steward or Stewards who may be Members of that Society.

(3) When a Secretary is appointed in any Leaders' Meeting, such Secretary must be chosen from among the Members of that Meeting (vol. xix. p. 454).

Let us regularly meet the Class Leaders, both in town and country; and at each Leaders' Meeting, let us carefully examine the entries made in the Class Books relative to the attendance of the Members, in order that prompt and practical measures may be taken in cases which, on inquiry, shall be found to demand the exercise of discipline, "the word of exhortation," or kindly counsel and Christian sympathy.

From the beginning, Leaders' Meetings have been found essential to the pastoral care and spiritual prosperity of our Societies, and also to the orderly transaction of their financial concerns. Where Leaders' Meetings are frequently held, the work of the Leaders is done more perfectly. And by a minute examination of the Class Books, in the presence of the Leaders, we learn who are the sick, the careless, or the lukewarm; and then, in making pastoral visits, we are prepared to go, "not only to those who want us, but to those who want us most." Let us, therefore, see to it that Leaders' Meetings are held regularly, and as often as practicable, not only in the towns in which Ministers reside, but also in the principal country places (1885, p. 360).

Part of the Leaders meet together on Sunday evening,

without any connexion with, or dependence on, the Assistant. We have no such custom in the three Kingdoms. It is overturning our discipline from the foundations. Either let them act under the direction of the Assistant, or let them meet no more (vol. i. p. 125).

The Conference, having received certain suggestions from District Meetings, and Memorials from Circuits, on the subject of the enlargement of the Leaders' Meeting, by the admission thereto of Sunday-school Superintendents, Local Preachers, Chapel Stewards, and others, expressed its judgment in the following terms:—The Conference regards the question of increasing the efficiency and importance of the Leaders' Meeting as one which, at the present time, demands the most serious attention of the Ministers in their Circuits, as a practical question of administration.

But the Conference cannot adopt any such change as is proposed in the constitution of the Leaders' Meeting; but it strongly insists upon the necessity of so working the Leaders' Meeting as to make it in reality what it is intended to be,—the Pastoral Council of the Society. In order to do this, the Conference urges the necessity of appointing new Leaders, and especially young Leaders of both sexes, and also of holding the Leaders' Meetings as often as possible for the purpose of close and systematic Pastoral oversight.

For the purpose of representing, when necessary, the general interests of the Society in regard to any special purpose or object that needs to be dealt with, combined Meetings of the Leaders' Meeting with the Trustees, the Sunday-school Committee, or any other local body connected with the Society, might be held occasionally. But to incorporate with the Leaders' Meeting the Local Preachers, Sunday-school Superintendents, Chapel Stewards, or other persons suggested by some of the Memorials would, in the judgment of the Conference, be to transform the Leaders' Meeting into a miscellaneous gathering, to which the proper functions of the Leaders' Meeting, whether as a Pastoral



Council, or as the Court of Discipline, could no longer belong (1891, p. 329).

*The Lord's Supper.*

The Lord's Supper shall be administered by the Assistant only, or such of his Helpers, who are in full connexion, as he shall appoint (vol. i. p. 337).

We once more earnestly beseech all the Members of our Societies conscientiously to attend this sacred ordinance of God our Saviour at every opportunity, and do entreat them to approach the Lord's Table *at least* once in every month, and to make a point of staying till the whole service be concluded.

In the visitation of the Classes, let every Preacher closely examine the Members on this head, and strongly enforce our Rules concerning it. And, in order to remove every excuse, let this blessed Sacrament be *regularly* and *frequently* administered (vol. ii. p. 349).

No person shall be suffered, on any pretence, to partake of the Lord's Supper among us unless he be a Member of Society, or receive a Note of Admission from the Superintendent (or from the Preacher administering), which Note must be renewed quarterly (vol. xvii. p. 622).

When the Lord's Supper is administered, the communicants shall be previously required to produce their Society Tickets or Notes of Admission, according to our established Rules (vol. vi. p. 65).

(Q.) How shall we keep off unworthy communicants?—

(A.) (1) By being exactly careful whom we admit into the Society; and (2) by giving Notes to none but those who come to us on the days appointed in each quarter (vol. i. p. 37).

*Love-feasts.*

Let no Love-feast be held but with the consent of the Superintendent (vol. xvii. p. 622).

Let no Local Preacher keep Love-feasts without the appointment of the Superintendent (vol. i. p. 361).

No person, not willing to join our Society, shall be admitted to a Love-feast more than once, nor then without a Note from a Travelling Preacher. We entreat both our Preachers and our Stewards to observe this direction; and let it be also understood, that any person who is proved to have lent a Society Ticket to another not in Society, for the purpose of deceiving the door-keepers, shall be suspended for three months (vol. iii. p. 31).

(Q.) How long should a Love-feast last?—(A.) Never above an hour and a half (vol. i. p. 51).

The money collected at the Love-feasts shall be most conscientiously given to the poor (vol. i. p. 224).

*Band Meetings.*

No Band Meetings shall be held without the approbation of the Superintendent (vol. ii. p. 348).

Let every Superintendent address to the believers under his care, met in their respective Societies, a strong and appropriate exhortation on the excellency of Band Meetings.

Let him meet all the Leaders of the Societies, and form out of their Classes as many Bands as possible from those believers who do not at present meet in Band, and who are willing so to do, putting into each Band those who are most acquainted with each other.

Let him afterwards receive the applications of all the Members of the Bands with the utmost kindness and attention, so as to remove them from one Band to another, and to meet the desires of each as far as possible.

The weekly Meetings, commonly called the Meetings of the Public Bands, shall be established and attentively preserved wherever the number of those who meet in Band will admit of it.

Love-feasts for the Members of the Band Societies shall be occasionally held in every place where it is practicable (vol. iii. p. 292).

Let the numbers of those who meet in Band in each Circuit be annually returned to the Conference by the Superintendents (vol. iii. p. 387).

## II. RELATING TO OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY.

No person shall, on any account, be permitted to retain any official situation in our Societies who holds opinions contrary to the total depravity of human nature, the Divinity and Atonement of Christ, the influence and witness of the Holy Spirit, and Christian holiness, as believed by the Methodists (vol. ii. p. 405).

Let strict inquiry be made by the Superintendent Preacher in the Leaders' Meeting, at least twice in the year, into the moral character of all the Leaders, their punctuality in beginning and ending their Class Meetings in proper time, and everything that relates to their office (vol. iii. p. 222).

### *Class Leaders.*

Let us, whenever a new Leader, nominated by us, and accepted by the Leaders' Meeting, shall be first introduced into the Meeting, take that opportunity of stating the duties which belong to the office, and of enforcing them on all present (vol. v. p. 150).

No person shall be appointed a Leader, or be removed from his office, but in conjunction with a Leaders' Meeting; the nomination to be with the Superintendent, and the approval or disapproval with the Leaders' Meeting (vol. xvii. p. 624).

All our Leaders are required regularly to attend their respective Leaders' Meetings (vol. iii. p. 156).

Let us affectionately, but firmly, enforce on the Leaders as an essential article of our pastoral discipline, and one which, in consequence of our constant itinerancy, cannot be dispensed with, the Rule of the Society in which it is stated to be the duty of a Leader "to see every Member in his Class *once in every week*" (vol. v. p. 150).

It is a settled and uniform principle of our discipline that Class Leaders shall belong to the Circuits in which they severally reside, and shall confine their stated and regular labours within the geographical bounds of those Circuits, unless the Superintendent of their own respective Circuits shall deem it advisable, in rare and extraordinary cases, and for some special purpose, connected with the prosperity of the work of God, to consent to a temporary suspension of this principle (vol. vi. p. 281).

*Stewards.*

The temporal concerns shall be managed by the Stewards chosen for that purpose, who shall keep books, wherein all moneys collected, received, or disbursed, on account of their respective Societies, shall be entered (vol. i. p. 314).

No person shall be appointed a Society Steward, or Poor Steward, or be removed from his office, but in conjunction with a Leaders' Meeting, the nomination to be with the Superintendent, and the approval or disapproval with the Leaders' Meeting.

The office of a Steward ceases at the end of the year, and no Steward shall remain in office above three years in succession, except in some extraordinary case.

Circuit Stewards are to be appointed at a Quarterly Meeting, the nomination being with the Superintendent, and the approval or disapproval with the Meeting.

Circuit Stewards are Members of the Financial District Meeting; and have also a right to attend the Annual Meeting of the District Committee during the transaction of certain parts of its business (vol. xvii. p. 624).

The Conference resolves that Circuit Stewards shall be, *ex officio*, Members of the Leaders' Meeting of the Society to which they belong (vol. xviii. p. 653).

The Trustees, in conjunction with the Superintendent, shall choose their own Stewards. The Stewards shall keep proper accounts in books provided for that purpose, which

books shall be open for the inspection of the Superintendent, and audited in his presence once every year, or oftener, if convenient (vol. xvii. p. 625).

### *Local Preachers.*

The Superintendent shall regularly meet the Local Preachers once a quarter; and no person shall receive a Plan as a Local Preacher, or be suffered to preach among us as such, without the approval of that Meeting. Or, if in any Circuit a regular Local Preachers' Meeting cannot be held, they shall be proposed and approved at the Quarterly Meeting of the Circuit.

All Local Preachers shall meet in Class. No exception shall be made in respect to any who have been Travelling Preachers.

Let no Local Preacher be permitted to preach in any other Circuit than his own without consent of the Superintendent of that Circuit.

Let no Local Preacher hold Love-feasts without the consent of the Superintendent, or in anywise interfere with his business. Let every one keep in his own place, and attend to the duties of his station.

No Minister who has been suspended or expelled shall, on any account, be employed as a Local Preacher without the authority of the Conference (vol. xvii. p. 625).

## III. RELATING TO CIRCUIT MEETINGS.

### *The Quarterly Meeting.*

*Constitution.*—1. All the Ministers and Preachers on Trial in the Circuit, and Supernumeraries whose names appear in the printed Minutes of the Conference.

2. The Circuit Stewards, all the Society Stewards, and the Poor Stewards.

3. All the Class Leaders in the Circuit.

4. All the Local Preachers of three years' continuous standing, after having been twelve months on trial,—they being resident Members of Society in the Circuit.

5. All the Trustees of Chapels situate in places named on the Circuit Plan, such Trustees being Members of Society in the Circuit (vols. xvii. p. 625 ; xviii. p. 652).

*Functions.*—Circuit Stewards are to be appointed at a Quarterly Meeting, the nomination being with the Superintendent, and the approval or disapproval with the Meeting (vol. xvii. p. 624).

All those expenses for the support of the Ministry for which the Circuit cannot provide, and therefore needs assistance from the Contingent Fund, must be sanctioned by the Quarterly Meeting before they can be brought to the District Committee (vol. xvii. p. 625).

No Circuit shall be divided until such division has been approved by the Quarterly Meeting (vol. xvii. p. 625).

No case of Chapel-building, purchase, or enlargement, shall be sanctioned by the Chapel Committee unless it has received the approbation of the Quarterly Meeting (vol. xvii. p. 626).

*March :—Invitations to Ministers.*—The Conference unanimously and earnestly recommends that the Quarterly Meetings throughout the Connexion should defer such invitations till the March Quarterly Meetings (vol. xvii. p. 627).

*Candidates.*—Before any Superintendent proposes a Preacher to the Conference, as proper to be admitted on trial, such Preacher must be approved at the March Quarterly Meeting (vol. xvii. p. 625).

*Representatives to the District Committee* — The Circuit Stewards of each Circuit shall be called upon at the March Quarterly Meeting to declare their ability and willingness to attend the ensuing Annual Meeting of the District Committee in May, or the contrary. If they, or either of them, shall declare inability or unwillingness to attend the said

District Committee, the Quarterly Meeting shall have the right of electing by and from its own Members, and by open vote, a Representative or Representatives to supply the vacancy or vacancies so created (vol. xx. p. 421).

*Foreign Missions.*—The accounts of the several (Circuit) Branches (having been audited) shall be reported to the March Quarterly Meeting (1888, p. 221).

*Junior Society Classes.*—Returns of the number of the young persons (meeting in these Classes) shall be made annually to the Circuit Quarterly Meeting in March (1878, p. 185).

*School Statistics.*—The Conference directs that the Statistics of the Day and Sunday Schools of each Circuit be read in the March Quarterly Meeting, but that if sufficient time be not available for the discussion of the Statistics and for inquiry into the state of the Schools, such discussion and inquiry shall take place in the June Quarterly Meeting (vol. xix. p. 696).

*June:—Memorials to Conference.*—(See *Memorials*, pp. 174, 175).

*Connexional Principle.*—The Circuit Quarterly Meeting affords a most valuable opportunity for bringing the Connexional Principle before the leading officials of our Circuits, and the Conference recommends that at each June Quarterly Meeting this should be done (1889, p. 288).

*Contributions to Connexional Funds.*—The Conference recommends that, at each June Quarterly Meeting, a report be made of the Circuit contributions to each Connexional Fund during the year (1889, p. 288).

*September:—New Legislation.*—It is determined that if at any time the Conference see it necessary to make any new Rule for the Societies at large, and such Rule should be objected to at the first Quarterly Meeting in any given Circuit, and if the major part of that Meeting be of opinion that the enforcing of such Rule in that Circuit will be injurious to the prosperity of that Circuit, it shall not be

enforced in opposition to the judgment of such Quarterly Meeting before the second Conference. But if the Rule be confirmed by the second Conference, it shall be binding to the whole Connexion. Nevertheless, the Quarterly Meetings, rejecting a new Rule, shall not, by publications, public meetings, or otherwise, make that Rule a cause of contention, but shall strive by every means to preserve the peace of the Connexion (vols. i. p. 393 ; xii. p. 117).

*Treasurer to Worn-out Ministers' Fund.*—In every Circuit, at the September Quarterly Meeting, a Circuit Treasurer for the Worn-out Ministers' and Widows' Fund shall be appointed (vol. xvii. p. 626).

*December.*—*United Trustees' Meeting.*—The Conference directs that henceforward the Secretary to the Circuit United Trustees' Meeting shall be appointed to his office at the December Quarterly Meeting ; and that the time of holding the United Trustees' Meeting shall be fixed at the December Quarterly Meeting (vol. xv. p. 520).

*Worn-out Ministers' Fund.*—The Circuit Treasurers shall close their accounts with the Class Leaders not later than the end of November, remit the money to the District Treasurer, and present their Statement to the Christmas Quarterly Meeting (1891, pp. 369, 370).

*Foreign Missions.*—1. In every Circuit where separate Committees for the several Local Branches are not otherwise appointed, such separate Committees or a General Circuit Committee shall be annually appointed by the December Quarterly Meeting.

2. The accounts of every Branch shall be closed not later than January 31st in each year, and audited during the first week in February by Auditors to be appointed by the preceding December Quarterly Meeting (1888, p. 221).

*Juvenile Home and Foreign Missionary Associations.*—In the case of Circuits which are not in a position to ask for the appointment of a Home Missionary Minister, and to give



the pledge required, but which feel the necessity of adopting some plan of *Home Missionary* operations, the subjoined allocation is allowed:—One-third of the sums received to be paid to the Funds of the Foreign Missionary Society, it being expressly understood that in every case the contribution to the Foreign Missions shall be at least equal to what has been presented from Christmas Offerings on the average of several preceding years; one-third to the Home Mission and Contingent Fund; one-third to the Circuit, to be expended in support of local movements of a *directly Home Missionary character*, under the direction of the Superintendent, and of a Committee to be appointed at the December Quarterly Meeting (1890, pp. 323, 324).

*N.B.*—(1.) Circuit Stewards are usually appointed at the December Quarterly Meeting; for Mode of Election, see page 165.

(2.) The Number of Members of Society in a Circuit should be presented to each Quarterly Meeting.

#### • *Special Circuit Meeting.*

Considering that one of the Regulations of 1835 provides that a Superintendent may appeal from the majority of a Leaders' Meeting to a *Minor District Meeting*, when "complaining of any Leaders' Meeting for refusing to act its constitutional part, or for acting it factiously or in contradiction to Law and Evidence, in the trial of an accused Member" or Local Officer, or for giving "a verdict notoriously inconsistent with the *facts proved*, and with the plain and obvious meaning, and the general or specific regulations, of the laws of God, or of our own body, as applicable to these facts,—or as even, in certain conceivable cases, refusing to give any verdict at all" . . . The Conference, after long and careful deliberation, agrees that, *instead* of such appeal by the *Superintendent* to a *Minor District Meeting*, and *before* an appeal be made to the Pastorate of the District, a *second trial* shall take place within the Circuit. And, while objecting, on principle, to invest the Quarterly Meeting with the power

of *final* decision in cases of discipline, the Conference enacts,—

1. That when such a case as the preceding paragraphs describe shall occur, the Superintendent shall be authorised to require a *re-hearing by a Special Circuit Meeting*, consisting of not more than twelve Lay Members of the Quarterly Meeting, to be chosen *for the occasion* by that Meeting, in such manner as it may deem proper.

2. That at such Special Circuit Meeting the Chairman of the District shall preside ; or, in case of unavoidable absence, shall appoint some other Minister of the District to preside in his place.

3. That the Meeting thus constituted shall have full power to re-hear the case.

4. That if, on such re-hearing, the accused party (whether a Leader, Local Preacher, Trustee, or other Local Officer, or Member of Society without any office) be found guilty by the verdict of the Special Circuit Meeting, the case shall then be left in the hands of the Pastorate ; and the Superintendent be empowered, after advising with the Chairman and his own colleagues, to remove the party so convicted, from the Society, or to administer any other measure of discipline which may be deemed sufficient.

5. That if the party so tried by the Special Circuit Meeting be dissatisfied with the *sentence* of the Superintendent, he shall have the right to appeal, *first*, to the Annual District Meeting, and afterwards, if still dissatisfied, to the Conference.

6. The Leaders' Meeting and the Special Circuit Meeting for re-hearing are entitled to declare, by their *verdict*, whether the facts alleged are, or are not, proved to their satisfaction ; and whether, in their opinion, those facts are violations "of the laws of God, or of our own Body." And the *verdict* of a Meeting for re-hearing is not to be reversed, unless a Special District Meeting or the Conference interpose, and deem that justice requires such reversal.

7. In most instances it is highly probable that a verdict which, from any cause, may have been given by a Leaders' Meeting "in contradiction to Law and Evidence," will, on a *re-hearing* of the case by a Special Circuit Meeting, appointed by the Quarterly Meeting, be corrected. But should the result unhappily show that the spirit of faction, or any other misleading influence, so extensively prevails in the Circuit as to prevent the ordinary administration of godly discipline, in such case it is to be understood that the Superintendent retains the right of appeal to the collective Pastorate of the District, and that the District Committee may then interpose by virtue of the powers with which it was originally invested in 1791, and which from that time it has exercised in great emergencies, and may adopt such measures (disciplinary or otherwise) as it may deem necessary to meet the "critical case" in question, and to maintain discipline and order in the disturbed Circuit "till the meeting of the next Conference, when the Chairman of the Committee shall lay the Minutes of its proceedings before the Conference" (see *Minutes*, 1791, vol. i. p. 249).

8. Should the Quarterly Meeting refuse to appoint a Special Meeting to re-hear the case, or should the persons appointed refuse to give any verdict, the Superintendent may at once appeal, in the usual form, to the District Committee.

9. Any Member or Local Officer of the Society, who, by the verdict of a Leaders' Meeting, is found guilty of *factious conduct*, may (as well as the Superintendent) claim a *re-hearing* by such Special Circuit Meeting, if he give notice of his wish to do so within the seven days which, according to Rule (*Minutes*, 1835, vol. vii. p. 581), are to intervene before the sentence be pronounced. If such notice be given, the Superintendent shall be required to take the necessary steps for the appointment of a Special Circuit Meeting, and the sentence shall be postponed till after that Meeting shall have given its verdict. Should the Special Circuit Meeting confirm the previous verdict of the Leaders' Meeting, and

a *sentence of expulsion* be consequently pronounced by the Superintendent (after consulting with the Chairman of the District and his own colleagues), the excluded party may appeal against the *sentence* to the Annual District Meeting, and, if still dissatisfied, to the Conference.

10. Whether the party objecting to a verdict of a Leaders' Meeting be the Superintendent or the person accused, the application of the *provision for a re-hearing*, by a Special Circuit Meeting, is to be strictly limited to such cases of *factious conduct* as "may possibly arise in seasons of peculiar excitement" (*Minutes*, vol. vii. p. 582), and as are described in the preamble of this section. And, further, the same provision, while modifying the *Superintendent's* privilege of calling for the interposition of the District Pastorate, in such cases as hereinbefore specified, is not to be understood as at all affecting the visitatorial power of the Chairman of the District, and the constitutional right of the District Committee to interpose its authority for the due maintenance of our discipline in a disturbed Society or Circuit. On the contrary, such power and right remain entire, in full and undiminished force, notwithstanding anything contained in these Regulations.

N.B. — The Regulation by which the Conference, in 1835, gave to a Member or Local Officer the right of appeal, in *ordinary cases*, to a *Minor District Meeting*, against a *sentence of expulsion* pronounced by the *Superintendent*, after the verdict of a *Leaders' Meeting*, remains unaltered by this provision for *extraordinary cases* (vol. xii. pp. 112-114).

#### *Other Formal Meetings.*

1. As the Leaders' Meeting is the proper Meeting for the Society, and the Quarterly Meeting for the Circuit, we think that other formal Meetings, in general, would be contrary to the Methodist economy, and very prejudicial in their consequences. But

2. In order to be as tender as possible, consistently with what we believe to be essential to the welfare of our Societies,

we allow that other formal Meetings may be held, if they first receive the approbation of the Superintendent and the Leaders' or Quarterly Meeting; provided also, that the Superintendent, if he please, be present at every such meeting (vol. i. p. 392).

#### IV. RELATING TO MEMORIALS.

As we desire to have every proper information on whatever concerns ourselves or our people, we will gladly receive intelligence, not only from our Leaders' and Quarterly Meetings, but from any individual Member of Society, as well at the District Meeting as at the Conference (vol. i. p. 366).

1. Should a majority of the June Quarterly Meeting, in any Circuit, be of opinion that it is desirable to address to the Conference a Memorial on any Connexional subject, and agree to do so,—that Meeting itself, subject to the Regulations which follow, shall have authority to adopt and transmit to the Conference such a Memorial. And at such Meeting any Member thereof may propose for consideration the propriety of addressing a Memorial to the Conference.

2. Not less than ten days previously to the June Quarterly Meeting, a copy in writing shall be given to the Superintendent of the particular Motion or Resolution which any Member of the Quarterly Meeting intends to propose, as the basis of a Memorial to the Conference; and no proposal, of which such notice has not been given, shall be brought forward that year.

But should the Quarterly Meeting adopt the substance or principle of a Resolution so brought forward, it may amend, as well as simply adopt or reject it.

3. A Memorial founded on such Motion or Resolution, if approved by a majority of the persons present, shall be signed by the Chairman of the Meeting; and he shall add a footnote stating the number of persons present, and also the number voting for and against the Memorial.

4. The Conference directs Superintendents of Circuits to

forward to the Convener of the Committee on Memorials and Suggestions all Memorials from Quarterly Meetings *ten days* before the opening of Conference.

Nevertheless, the Conference will, as heretofore, receive Memorials up to and including the second day of its session.

5. All Memorials thus received by the Conference shall be referred to a Committee of its Members, who shall carefully examine, consider, and classify the whole, and present their report thereon to the Conference.

6. With regard to the subjects of such Memorials, the Conference cannot entertain any proposals which are of a manifestly revolutionary character, or subversive of that system of Doctrine or Discipline which has been confided to it as a sacred deposit by Mr. Wesley; and which, as the Conference believes, has also been committed to its keeping by the providence and grace of God.

7. Neither can the Conference sanction such Memorials as involve a direct interference on the part of one Circuit with the local affairs or proceedings of any other Circuit.

No Memorial can be received from the Quarterly Meeting of a Circuit, except in manuscript.

The consideration and determination of all questions raised by Memorials from Circuit Quarterly Meetings shall come within the province of the Conference when exclusively ministerial, or when the Lay Representatives shall be present, according to the subject matter thereof respectively (1891, p. 362).

#### V. RELATING TO SUNDRY POINTS OF DISCIPLINE.

##### *Pastoral Address.*

The Superintendents are directed to appoint at each principal Chapel in their Circuits a Special Society Meeting, to be held either in the afternoon of the Lord's Day, or on some convenient evening of the week, for the purpose of having the Pastoral Address read to the Society, and made the subject of suitable remarks and exhortations (vol. viii. p. 360).

The Superintendents are directed gratuitously to furnish every Steward, Local Preacher, and Class Leader in their respective Circuits with a copy of the Annual Pastoral Address of the Conference to the Methodist Societies (vol. v. p. 520).

*Observance of the Lord's Day.*

(Q.) What directions shall be given concerning the keeping of the Lord's Day holy?—(A.) We are afraid that some of our people are not sufficiently attentive to this ordinance of God. We, therefore, strongly recommend the religious observance of that sacred day, and desire our Assistants to exclude every person from the Society who buys or sells on the Lord's Day, unless the sin be acknowledged and forsaken, except in the case of medicine for the sick, or of supplying necessities for funerals (vol. i. p. 336).

The Conference, fully recognising the Divine Institution and perpetual obligation of the Christian Sabbath, views, with deep sorrow and alarm, the growing desecration of the Lord's Day by means of railway travelling and steamboat excursions; and feels called upon afresh to record its solemn conviction of the claims of the sacred day on the universal observance of a Christian people, and to urge those claims, especially at the present time, on the Members of our Societies and congregations; and earnestly exhorts them to cultivate a more solemn and practical regard to that invaluable and Divine Institution, and to withhold their sanction and countenance from every form of Sabbath profanation; and especially warns them against the attractions of "cheap trains," and other facilities to the infringement of the sacredness of the Lord's Day (vol. x. p. 395).

*Family Religion.*

We again earnestly enforce upon all the people under our care a conscientious and uniform attention to this important subject, and solemnly exhort them to maintain the practice of daily prayer in their houses; to have stated times allotted

for this purpose ; to fix their morning worship, for instance, just before breakfast, and their evening worship just before supper ; to make the daily *reading of the Holy Scriptures* a constant part of their domestic devotion ; to require not only *some* but all the members of their respective families to be present at the time of family worship ; and to allow of no excuses, except in case of sickness or other unavoidable emergencies ; and, once at least every week, to *catechise* their children and servants, and converse with them individually on the business of religion.

We require all our Preachers to make particular inquiries into the state of family religion in their Circuits ; to enforce the duties above mentioned in the Leaders' Meetings, and in the Society Meetings ; and to speak on the subject closely and strongly in every Class in their Quarterly Visitations of the Societies (vol. iii. p. 221).

#### *Days of Fasting.*

A general Fast shall be held in all our Societies the first Friday after New Year's Day, after Lady Day, after Midsummer Day, and after Michaelmas Day (vol. xvii. p. 624).

#### *Commercial Failures.*

1. To prevent scandal, whenever any Member of Society becomes a bankrupt, or compounds with his creditors, the Superintendent and one of the Stewards shall talk with him at large. If a formal investigation be considered needful, a Committee shall be chosen by the Leaders' Meeting for that purpose on the nomination of the Superintendent, to consist of two or more competent persons, Members of Society, who may or may not be Members of the Leaders' Meeting ; the Superintendent to be the Chairman. If, on receiving their report, the Meeting shall conclude that fair accounts have not been kept, or that liabilities have been incurred without a reasonable probability of meeting them, the Superintendent shall proceed according to Rule.



2. On the appointment of such Committee in the case of any Leader, Local Preacher, or Steward, the exercise of his functions shall be discontinued until his case is decided.

If any of our Members, who have formerly failed in business, shall afterwards, by the blessing of God, have acquired property, it is their plain duty to pay their whole debt (vol. xvii. p. 623).

#### *Creating Strife in a Circuit.*

If any local Officer or Member of our Society shall be found endeavouring to create or encourage dissension and strife in his own or in any other Circuit, or addicting himself to injurious railing against either the Doctrine, or the Discipline, or the Ministers of the Connexion, the person so offending shall be admonished by the Superintendent of the error of his ways; and if he still persist in his offence, shall, after trial, in the usual form, if this be demanded, be put away from the Society (vol. xii. p. 115).

#### *Dancing.*

Those school-masters and school-mistresses who receive dancing-masters into their schools, and those parents who employ dancing-masters for their children, shall be no longer Members of our Society (vol. i. p. 256).

#### *Worldly Amusements.*

The Conference has observed, with sincere regret, the existence, in some quarters, of a disposition to indulge in and encourage amusements which it cannot regard as harmless or allowable. The obligation which rests on Christians to "do all to the glory of God" must be held to extend even to their recreations; and recreations which lead to association with the ungodly and promote a trifling spirit, which indispose persons for devotional exercises, and do not harmonise with that use of "the Word of God and prayer" by which the social intercourse of Christians should be

hallowed, can never be safely or innocently followed by any who desire to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour." It behoves all such to keep at the utmost distance from evil, and to set an example which shall at once instruct and reprove the ungodly; but this is never done when they approach as nearly as possible to the fashions and practices of an evil world, instead of obeying the injunction to "come out from among them and be separate." The original Rules of our Societies are express against such *music* and other *diversions* as do not accord with these general principles; and subsequent Regulations have specified *dancing* as incompatible with Christian propriety. The well-known Rule which forbids the teaching of dancing in schools conducted by Methodists proceeds upon the principle of its unlawfulness, and was clearly intended to condemn and prevent the practice, not merely in schools and among pupils, but among Methodists in general. To the views long since indicated, the Conference still entirely adheres; and it affectionately entreats heads of families to regulate their households in accordance with them, and exhorts the younger Members of Society not to be "conformed to this world"; to practise self-denial in relation to every subject which demands it; and to watch against every practice, however fashionable or fascinating, which tends to lower the tone of devotional feeling, or impair the influence of a Christian profession (vol. xiii. p. 302).

#### *Trust Properties and Amusements.*

Having regard to the growing practice of using our Trust Properties for amusements and other purposes not contemplated in the formation of the several Trusts, the Conference calls the attention of Ministers and Trustees to the terms of their several Trust Deeds. The Conference reminds the Superintendents of Circuits that our Trust Properties can only legally be used for such purposes as are in accordance with the provisions of the Deeds. Such purposes are

declared by the Chapel Model Deed to be, "For places of Religious Worship, and for public and other Meetings and Services held according to the General Rules and Usages of the people called Methodists, as they appear in and by the Annual Minutes of the Conference from time to time published" (1880, p. 191).

## VI. RELATING TO DISTRICT MEETINGS.

### *The Annual District Committee.*

(For the origin of District Committees, see vol. i. p. 249.)

(Q.) What regulations are necessary for the preservation of our whole economy, as the Rev. Mr. Wesley left it?—  
(A.) Let the three Kingdoms be divided into Districts (vol. i. p. 249).

The Committees of the Districts shall determine all appeals whatsoever during the intervals of the Conference; and therefore all applications on Society business during the said intervals, which cannot be determined by the Assistants of the Circuits, shall be made to the Committees only (vol. i. p. 254).

The Chairman of each District, in conjunction with his brethren of the Committee, shall be responsible to the Conference for the execution of the laws, as far as his District is concerned (vol. i. p. 395).

The Chairman (*i.e.* of the District Committee) shall have authority to call a Meeting of the Committee of his District on any application of the Preachers or people which appears to him to require it. But he must never individually interfere with any other Circuit but his own (vol. i. p. 269).

Except in cases expressly provided for by the Conference, viz. the Circuit Quarterly Meeting and the Special Circuit Meeting, the Chairman of the District ought not so far to set aside the office and responsibility of the Superintendent

of a Circuit as to take the chair at any Meeting for the administration of discipline in any Circuit other than his own, unless a District Committee in special circumstances otherwise direct.

Even in such special circumstances, unless a District Committee otherwise direct, the Superintendent should be responsible for administering, after consultation with the Chairman and his own colleagues, any measures of discipline which may be deemed necessary (vol. xviii. p. 650).

The Conference declares its unalterable resolution to uphold the authority hitherto vested in its District Committees, as intermediate and subordinate Courts of Inquiry and Appeal, both for the Ministers and for the people; whilst to all parties duly respecting that authority, it still leaves unfettered the right of an ultimate appeal to the Conference (vol. xi. p. 678).

#### *The Minor District Meeting.*

If any Preacher be accused of immorality, the Preacher accused, and his accuser, shall respectively choose two Preachers of their District; and the Chairman of the District shall, with the four Preachers chosen as above, try the accused Preacher; and they shall have authority, if he be found guilty, to suspend him till the ensuing Conference, if they judge it expedient.

If there be any difference between the Preachers in a District, the respective parties shall choose two Preachers; and the Chairman of the District, with the four Preachers so chosen, shall be final arbiters to determine the matters in dispute.

In both cases the Chairman shall have a casting-voice, in case of an equality (vol. i. p. 289).

The Conference now agrees and resolves—That the *principle* of the Rule of 1793, respecting the appointment of *Minor District Committees* in the case of Preachers, shall be

extended also to the case of all excluded Members, who choose to avail themselves of its provisions. And excluded persons shall, therefore, have the right of selecting *any two* Preachers of the District to which his Circuit belongs, and the Superintendent shall select *two other* such Preachers; and these four, with the Chairman of the District [or if it happen that the Chairman is himself the Superintendent whose act is impugned, then some other Preacher to be chosen by the four other Members as their Chairman *pro tempore*] shall meet in some convenient place, and shall have the power of modifying, reversing, or confirming the sentence against which such appeal shall be made. Their decision shall in such case be binding on all parties, unless subsequently altered on further appeal, by the full District Committee, or by the Conference (vol. vii. p. 581).

In all cases in which the holding of a Minor District Meeting is rendered necessary, such Meeting, except under the Regulation passed by the Conference in 1840 (*Minutes*, vol. ix. p. 94, *see below*), shall be held in the District in which the accused party resides, the accused and the accuser selecting respectively two Ministers from the said District, who, with the Chairman thereof, shall constitute the Minor District Meeting.

Should either party refuse or decline to choose two Ministers, to act as Members of the Meeting, the Chairman is empowered and directed to nominate them, so that the number required by Rule may be made up (vol. xviii. p. 154).

When the accused Preacher's Circuit is so distant from the locality in which the charges arise, that, in the judgment of the Chairman of his District, sanctioned by the concurrent opinion of the President, a serious hindrance would be caused by the attendance of witnesses, it is resolved that the case may be tried in a Minor or Regular District Meeting of that District from which the charges are preferred; but the proceedings shall be fully reported to the Chairman of the District in which the Preacher is stationed to the May

District Meeting of that District, and to the President of the Conference (vol. ix. p. 94).

The Conference declares that if, in any case, it appears to the Chairman of a District that a demand for a Minor District Meeting rests upon charges which are frivolous or vexatious, it is deemed to be within his discretionary power to decline to summon such a Meeting, subject, however, to an appeal to the District Committee, or to the Conference, on the part of any of the persons concerned (vol. xx. p. 156).

### *The Special District Meeting.*

In order to render our Districts more effective, the President of the Conference shall have power . . . to assist at any District Meeting, if applied to for that purpose, by the Chairman of the District, or by a majority of the Superintendents in such District. And he shall have a right, if written to by any who are concerned, to visit any Circuit, and to inquire into their affairs with respect to METHODISM, and, in union with the District Committee, redress any grievance.

That no Chairman may have cause to complain of the want of power, in cases which (according to his judgment) cannot be settled in the ordinary District Meeting, he shall have authority to summon three of the nearest Superintendents to be incorporated with the District Committee, who shall have equal authority to vote, and settle everything till the Conference (vol. i. p. 395).

In 1835 it was enacted—That instead of “three of the nearest Superintendents,” chosen by the Superintendent who calls the Meeting, *four* Superintendents, or *other* Preachers, may be called in, if either party desires such assistance, and be incorporated with the Preachers stationed in the District. Of these, *two shall be chosen by each of the two parties* concerned in the affairs to be settled by the Meeting. The parties may severally make choice of Preachers in whom they have most confidence, from any District, *without*

*restriction as to contiguity*; and the President of the Conference, if he judge it expedient, may attend and preside in all such assemblies, according to the Regulations of 1797. The right of appeal to the Conference from the decisions of this, as of all other inferior jurisdictions, is to be considered as reserved to all parties (vol. vii. p. 583).

*The Mixed District Meeting.*

1. The appointment of Preachers shall remain solely with the Conference; and no Trustee, or number of Trustees, shall expel or exclude from their Chapel or Chapels any Preachers so appointed.

2. Nevertheless, if the majority of the Trustees, or the majority of the Stewards and Leaders of any Society, believe that any Preacher appointed for their Circuit is immoral, erroneous in doctrines, deficient in abilities, or that he has broken any of the Rules above mentioned,<sup>1</sup> they shall have authority to summon the Preachers of the District, and all the Trustees, Stewards, and Leaders of the Circuit, to meet in their Chapel on a day and hour appointed (sufficient time being given). The Chairman of the District shall be the President of the assembly; and every Preacher, Trustee, Steward, and Leader shall have a single vote, the Chairman possessing also the casting-voice. And if the majority of the Meeting judge that the accused Preacher is immoral, erroneous in doctrines, deficient in abilities, or has broken any of the Rules above mentioned, he shall be considered as removed from that Circuit; and the District Committee shall, as soon as possible, appoint another Preacher for that Circuit, instead of the Preacher so removed; and shall determine among themselves how the removed Preacher shall be disposed of till the Conference, and shall have authority to suspend the said

<sup>1</sup> The Rules contained in Section I. of the Plan of Pacification relate to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Baptism, and Service in Church hours.

Preacher from all public duties till the Conference, if they judge proper. The District Committee shall also supply, as well as possible, the place of the removed Preacher, till another Preacher be appointed; and the Preacher thus appointed, and all other Preachers, shall be subject to the above mode of trial. And if the District Committee do not appoint a Preacher for that Circuit, instead of the removed Preacher, within a month after the aforesaid removal, or do not fill up the place of the removed Preacher till another Preacher be appointed, the majority of the said Trustees, Stewards, and Leaders, being again regularly summoned, shall appoint a Preacher for the said Circuit, provided he be a Member of the Methodist Connexion, till the ensuing Conference.

3. If any Preacher refuse to submit to the above mode of trial, in any of the cases mentioned above, he shall be considered as suspended till the Conference. And if any Trustees expel from any Chapel a Preacher, by their own *separate* authority, the Preachers appointed for that Circuit shall not preach in that Chapel till the ensuing Conference, or till a trial take place according to the mode mentioned above.

4. If any Trustees expel or exclude a Preacher, by their own *separate* authority, from any Chapel in any Circuit, the Chairman of the District shall summon the Members of the District Committee, the Trustees of that Circuit who have not offended, and the Stewards and Leaders of the Circuit. And the Members of such assembly shall examine into the evidence on both sides; and if the majority of them determine that the state of the Society in which the exclusion took place requires that a new Chapel should be built previous to the Meeting of the Conference, every proper step shall be immediately taken for erecting such Chapel. And no step shall on any account be taken to erect a Chapel for *such purpose*, before the Meeting of the Conference, till such Meeting be summoned, and such determination made.

5. No Preacher shall be suspended or removed from his



Circuit by any District Committee, except he have the privilege of the trial before mentioned<sup>1</sup> (vol. i. p. 341).

<sup>1</sup> In explanation of the last clause, it should be noted that, in his Judgment in Dr. Warren's case, Lord Chancellor Lyndhurst said:—"No District Committee has the power of giving the Preacher the benefit of the trial before mentioned. There is no authority for that purpose: they have no power to convene this mixed tribunal; there are no regulations authorising them to do so; and if it was meant that the District Committee should have had such a power, there is no doubt, I apprehend, it would have been distinctly provided for. It does appear to me, therefore, that the case is very strong and very clear with respect to the power of the District Committee; and that the District Committee still, notwithstanding the Act of Pacification, have a right, have authority, to suspend or to remove a Preacher in all cases, except in those particular cases mentioned in the Act of Pacification, where the Trustees and other parties therein mentioned choose to interfere. I think in all other cases they have authority to suspend or to remove" (vol. xi. p. 479).

## APPENDIX III.



### BOOKS SUITABLE FOR CLASS LEADERS.

[In the compilation of this List, valuable assistance has been rendered by the Rev. John Shaw Banks and the Editor of the Prize Essays on the Class Meeting.]

*Any New Book in this List may be had at the Wesleyan  
Methodist Book-Room.*

- AITKEN : The Difficulties of the Soul. 1s. 6d.  
ANGUS : Bible Handbook. 5s.  
ARNOT : Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth. 4s. 6d.  
Parables of our Lord. 4s. 6d.  
ARTHUR : Tongue of Fire. 1s. 6d.  
Physical and Moral Law. 3s.  
BAMFORD : Father Fervent. 2s. 6d.  
BANKS : Manual of Christian Doctrine. 3s. 6d.  
BARRETT : Temptation of Christ. 3s. 6d.  
BATE : Class Leaders' Treasury. 7s. 6d.  
BAXTER : Saints' Everlasting Rest. 2s. 6d.  
BEET, DR. : Commentary on Romans. 7s. 6d.  
                  "          Corinthians. 10s. 6d.  
                  "          Galatians. 5s.  
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